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HERESIES AND HUMOURS

BY

MAJOR C. S. JARVIS, C.M.G., O.B.E.

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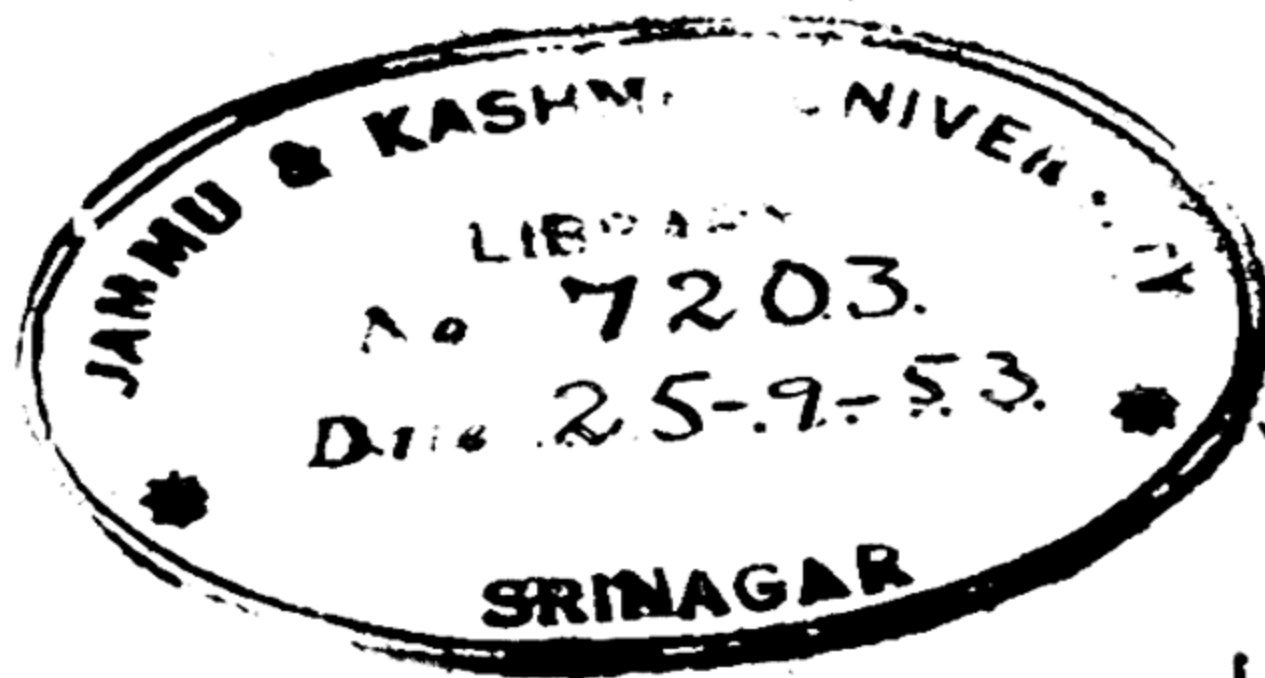
R. A. YOUNG



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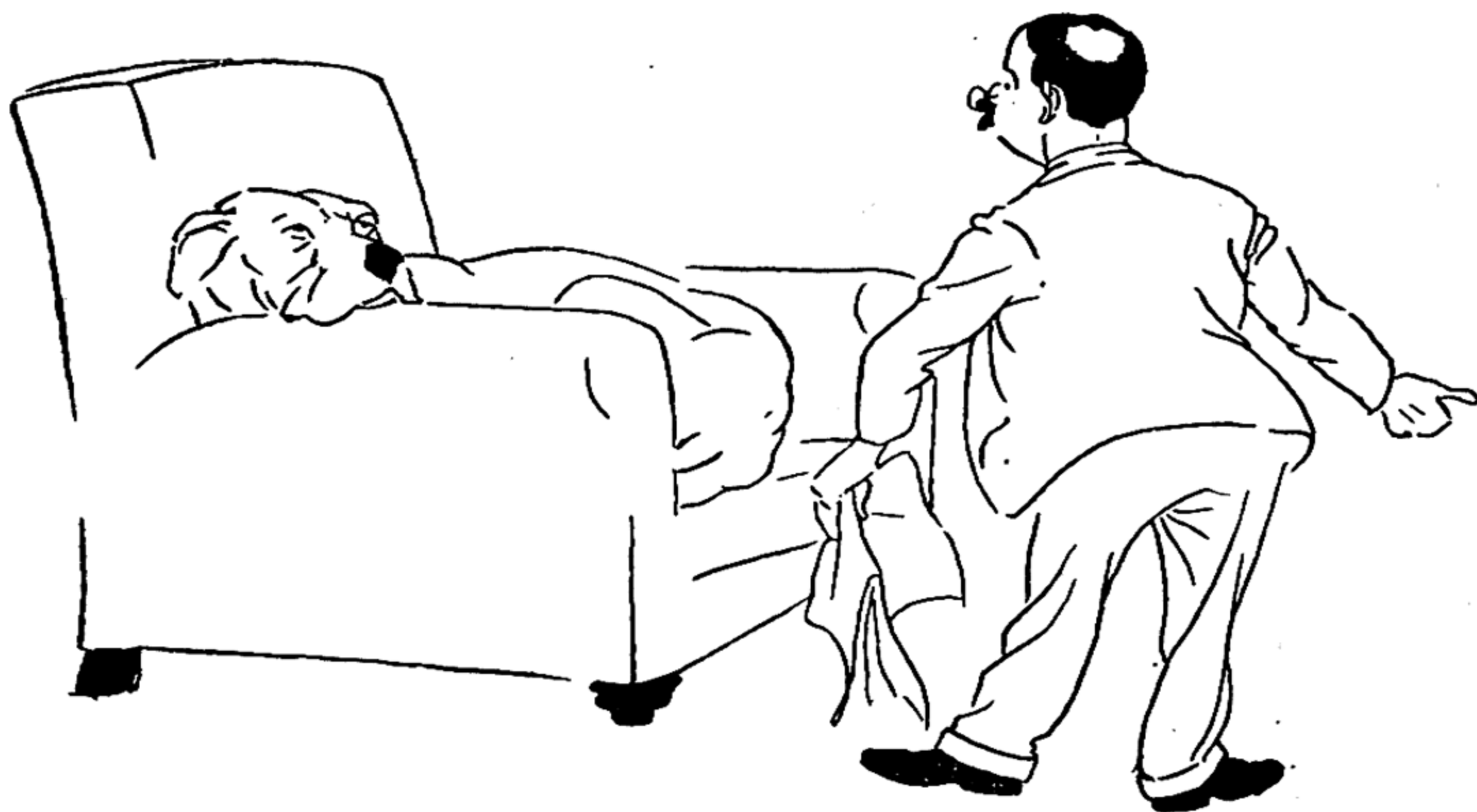
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Chapter One

Your Dog and Mine

Statisticians are never defeated by anything. They will cheerfully give the exact numbers of wild wood pigeons visiting this country in any one year, together with the bushels of corn they have eaten; the cost to British farmers per annum of the rat pest in pounds, shillings and pence and various other details of a similar nature, which make the ordinary man gasp with amazement at their courage and erudition. But so far, I believe they have never attempted to make a statement about the number of dog lovers in the British Isles. The great thing about being a statistician is that you provide figures which no one has the slightest chance of refuting because no one has any means of checking them, and this being the case, and the risk of being caught out extremely small, I shall honour myself by joining their ranks. I put the number of people in this country who are completely idiotic about dogs at 35 million, those who are very fond of dogs but realise that humans have some rights at 15 millions, and those who dislike dogs at 495,000, most of whom are elderly and are dying off quickly. If anyone would like to prove that these figures are incorrect both I and my publisher will apologise in writing.

I have always held that dogs are like governments: one gets those one deserves. In other words, provided you obtain your dog young enough you will make him and mould him to your heart's desire. Of course he will not come true to pattern in every detail—it would be a poor sort of dog who did not assert his individuality here and there and develop a soul of his own—but one way and another you will achieve a gentleman. This is, I admit, a dreadful expression and I would not extend it to the best of my friends except to be sarcastic, to the young man who sells me shirts, nor to the local road-mender, but it has a certain value as a description when applied to a dog or in fact to anyone who does not claim to be one. There are, of course, rare exceptions, and some dogs are born to be cads, so that no training or upbringing will alter them, but given equal opportunities I



... those who are very fond of dogs but realise that humans have some rights.

would say there are fewer natural cads in the canine world than in the human.

In my Notes in *Country Life* some time ago I raised the point whether a dog possesses a sixth sense or not—the sixth sense being the ability to read what is in his master's mind, and other matters concerning Master, for, of course, no one else counts; to know of his approach after absence by car, train or on foot long before the dog can hear, scent or see anything. I have used the word 'Master' here, and before I go farther I would point out that Master means also 'Mistress'—if I have to put 'Master or Mistress' and 'his or her' throughout this chapter it will make lop-sided reading, but I am fully aware that at least fifty per cent. of the dogs in this land belong to women and, being animals of good taste, prefer them to males.

The mention of the sixth sense brought a large number of replies, and the various correspondents were equally divided among those who agreed about the sixth sense and those who did not agree, but maintained that the dog notices small but important details which

enable him to draw his conclusions. The delightful part about the dog is that, provided one keeps off the prickly question of Field Trials, one can conduct a correspondence in a newspaper without everyone losing his temper and one can seldom do this with horses, salmon, trout, foxes and other adjuncts to our sporting lives. I have met several cases of what I call sixth sense in dogs I have owned and one, which has occurred frequently with my present Scottie, concerns the garden rabbit. In common with everybody else who lives in a rabbit area I have wire-netting all round the garden and, like everybody else, I have a rabbit within the wire. This rabbit belongs apparently to a special species as it can open itself out like an expanding ladder or accordion, and eat bark and valuable plants far beyond the reach of any ordinary animal. It is also a horticultural expert and can pick out at a glance, or sniff, the extra special delphinium from the ordinary ones, the Russell lupins from the common variety, and the carnations which cost ten shillings a root. There is nothing very unusual in this as in almost every garden in the land there is a rabbit of this type.

My aim and object is to kill this rabbit, and about once a month he gives me a chance by squatting on the lawn in the early morning. I see him when I go into my wife's room to call her, and the first time this happened, as I did not wish to scare the wits out of her, I said quietly: 'There's a rabbit in the garden and I'm going to get my gun and shoot it.' Immediately the Scottie, who was fast asleep on his bed, sprang up and jumped to the window with a volley of barks, which settled the matter for that morning. This of course was easily ex-

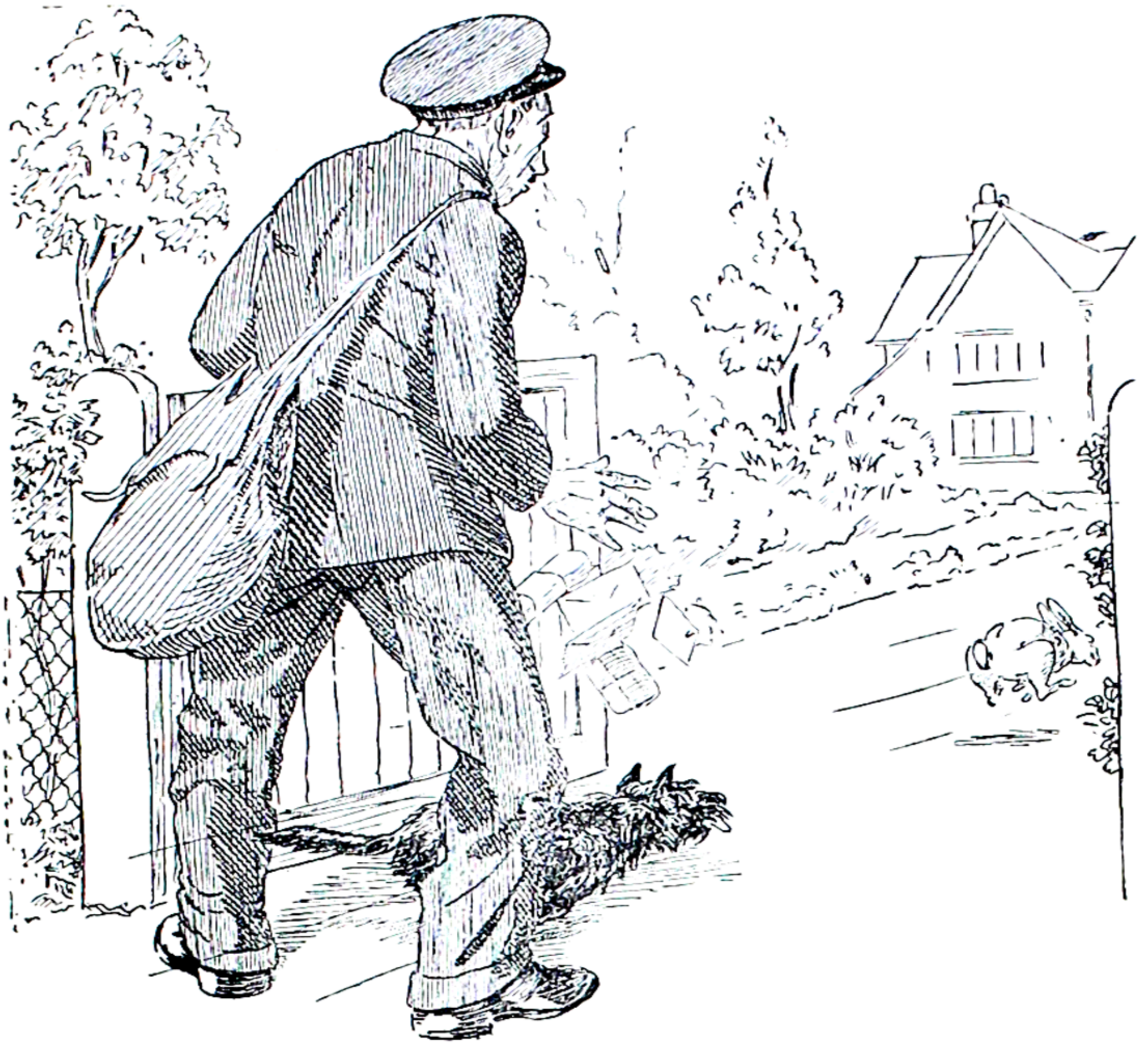


*I would point out that Master means also
'Mistress'.*

plained as the dog knows the words 'gun' and 'rabbit'. The next time this occurred about three weeks later I spoke to my wife in Arabic and, as the dog was not in Egypt with us, he does not understand the language. The result, however, was precisely the same. Since then I have seen the rabbit on many occasions and, arguing that my wife's nerves must suffer in a good cause, I say nothing and try to get out of the room to my gun in an easy and natural manner, but it is not the slightest use; the moment I see the rabbit and think of the gun the dog wakes up to leap at the window and bark. This I maintain proves a sixth sense, or an ability to read thoughts, for I glance out of that window every morning and see things which interest me on most days—a blackbird fight, the great spotted woodpecker on the lawn, or a sparrowhawk hunting—but the dog remains fast asleep and does not move an eyelid. He is interested only in the rabbit.

The garden rabbit figured in another story in which the postman, acting as villain or accomplice, played an important part. One morning early the Scottie located the rabbit in a patch of Michaelmas daisies, on one side of which was the wire fence and on the other the path separating it from the main garden, and the latter was manned by the whole family, the gardener and the milkman who at that moment put in a convenient appearance. The Scottie was then put into the daisies and the rabbit rushed out, hit the wire fence and bounced off. The Scottie a yard behind him did precisely the same thing, and both animals after their bounces returned to the daisies. This happened three times, but on the third occasion the postman happened to come up the lane, opened the gate and the rabbit, who had shot his bolt, slipped through it to the fields beyond.

On the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread this was fairly satisfactory as, although the rabbit was still living, he was outside his Garden of Eden to which, God willing, he would never return. The following morning, however, as we came back from our early morning walk, we saw the garden rabbit sitting in the field and rubbing his nose disconsolately. With a yelp of rage the Scottie rushed at him, put him through the hedgerow and chased him down the lane. With an unusual turn of speed he had got within a



The postman came up the lane, opened the gate, and the rabbit popped in.

couple of yards of the rabbit's scut when once more the postman came up the lane, opened the gate, and the rabbit popped in. This constituted what the Foreign Office calls a *status ante quo*, and until it happened I have never understood the real significance of the Latin tag.

A breed of dog which has probably the finest intelligence of the species is the working sheep dog, but one does not hear so much about their wonderful exploits as their owners are too busy with sheep to write accounts of their dogs' deeds. A sheep dog of my acquaintance, however, provided a striking instance of the sixth sense in Dorset some years ago. It was a Sunday afternoon, and a stray dog had got at a flock of sheep, which were carefully penned up in a hurdled enclosure in a swede field. and had scattered them all over the cliffs. The shepherd, who happened to be passing that way on his Sunday afternoon walk with his family, was doing his best to collect them, but it was a long and difficult business for a mere man to undertake. I asked the shepherd where was old Peter, the sheep dog.

'He has every Sunday afternoon off,' said the shepherd, 'and well he knows it. He's asleep in front of the fire, and there he'll bide to bedtime as he gets all the exercise he wants during the week. If you don't mind watching the sheep for half an hour to see that dog don't come back, I'll walk over and fetch Peter as I'll never get the flock together by myself.'

His cottage was over a mile away on the other side of a high down, but before the shepherd could start off on his walk Peter came over the rise full gallop and without checking his stride proceeded to round up the sheep.

'I was hoping for that,' said the shepherd. 'It isn't the first time by a long chalk that he's known there was something wrong with his sheep when he couldn't see nor hear nothing.'

It was my belief that the dog possesses a most efficient mechanical ear, which enables him to recognise the beat of his own car's engine at a distance of half a mile. My car is a very popular model, and there are half a dozen others of the same make in the district, but the Scottie

can recognise the stroke of its pistons long before the car is in sight. He does this so accurately that frequently I am afraid I must have a tappet loose or a big-end bearing beginning to go, but other correspondents have assured me that I need not worry about the condition of my engine as the dog knows of its approach by his sixth sense and not from the particular stroke of the piston. The fact remains, however it is achieved, that every dog who is an entity in the family knows his own car infallibly from that of many others. The superior *homo sapiens* may make a mistake and place his parcels, or even attempt to drive off, in the car of another man, but that member of a lowlier creation—the dog—would never be guilty of such a bad *gaffe*. He will go straight up to his own car, even if it is parked among some two hundred others.

Shooting dogs appear to provide more good stories than any other type, due to the fact they play a very important part in the lives of their masters. A very common habit with sporting dogs in the shooting season is to go up to master's dressing-room in the morning to find out what clothes and boots he is putting on and, if all is well sartorially, a close watch is then kept on the gun case or cupboard. In this connection a friend of mine relates a story of his Labrador bitch, but his evidence being hearsay would not be admitted in a court of law and the reader may therefore believe it or not as he pleases. One day the bitch, who was asleep upstairs, woke up with the knowledge that, while she was off her guard, Master has basely deserted her and gone out without asking his dog to accompany him. This was bad enough, but there was the horrible thought at the back of her mind that Master had been so lost to all sense of decency as to go out with the gun without his proper companion. She ran downstairs into the smoke-room in a panic, looked up at the gun cabinet and seeing all guns present and correct in their tracks went back to bed.

The question arose when two or three dog lovers were gathered together as to whether the canine nature was capable of showing spite. It was decided that spite was a harsh word to use as it suggests a mean and despicable nature, but that many dogs, when they are

treated as personal friends, will show Master by their deeds afterwards if they disapprove of some action he has taken.

I recall a very clear case of retaliation when a man in my regiment insisted upon sending his retriever, Shot, into a stream for a swim when out for exercise one summer's evening. Shot was very much a shooting dog and took life very seriously indeed. For him there were only seven months in the year—those from August to February when the gun was in use—and for a professional retriever to be asked to do a ridiculous and useless thing, like taking to water when there were no duck or snipe to be picked up, was intolerable. It was a clear sign he was being treated as a silly pet dog and that Master had become temporarily deranged. There ensued an unhappy scene when both dog and human lost their tempers, and finally Shot waded in mutinously and slowly, swam round in a small circle, and took the trouble to come out through an extremely boggy bit of black river mud.

After dinner that night my friend found Shot curled up in—not on—his camp bed, with the crumpled and soiled sheets draped round him and his head on the pillow. Shot had been brought up very strictly and never in his life had he dreamed of jumping into a chair, and as for climbing on to that sacred thing, a bed, the idea was unthinkable. It was a very clear case of a justifiable reprisal, and as the whole regiment, who had gathered round to shout with laughter, took Shot's part, he escaped the thrashing which had been promised him.

Jealousy among shooting dogs is inevitable, and who is in a position to criticise them, for jealous shots in the syndicate or shooting party are not unknown? I went after quail on one occasion in the East with a party which included an Oriental who was a very fine shot indeed, but who unfortunately regarded shooting as a test of skill and a competition on a par with golf or billiards. After every patch had been walked through, during which he took everybody's bird, he shouted out the number of his bag, together with the cartridges expended, and by the end of the day the whole party had lost all sense of decency so that we were blowing quails to pieces

under the very barrels of our neighbours and almost fighting over corpses. Having seen this disgusting disintegration of a shooting party, and having taken part in it myself, who am I to find fault if two retrievers have words over a partridge?—after all they are not claiming the birds as proof of their own prowess, but solely because they happen to belong to a supreme being, so wonderful in every way that if a bird should fall it must of course have been shot by Master.

One of the best of the many amusing stories about retrievers concerns a Labrador, who belonged to a very fine shot in the south of England and who was in his opinion the cleverest dog in England. One day when he was shooting with a neighbour's party a strong runner cock pheasant was down just before lunch, and every dog was put on the line in turn without success. Finally the Labrador's owner was called upon: 'Put your dog on, R——; you've told us so often he never fails. Let's see what he can do here.'

The retriever disappeared into the bracken and, as nothing occurred for ten minutes beyond a glimpse of a yellow tail waving here and there, the party gave up hope and went off to lunch in the keepers' hut near by. While they were at the meal the Labrador came in and presented his master with a cock pheasant.

'There you are,' said his owner, triumphantly. 'Didn't I tell you he was the finest dog in England, and——'

At this moment the head keeper burst in.

'Where's that damned yellow retriever?' he asked. 'He jumped into the game cart, picked up a pheasant and made off with it.'

The peculiar part about this shady episode was that it was a cock pheasant and not a hen the dog was trying to find. Was it merely an accident or deliberate choice which made him select a cock?

Another retrieving story concerns a stout-hearted little Cocker who was out with Master one day alone on a marauding expedition to find something for the pot. A hare got up on the moor, was hit too far back, and went away over the rise in a manner which suggested he would drop dead within three hundred yards or so. The cocker was sent after him and was absent for nearly half-an-hour. When he

returned he was empty-handed, or to be more correct empty-mouthed, but there was something about his uneasy manner which suggested a feeling of guilt, that something had occurred behind the hill of which he was ashamed. He was asked sternly what he had done, and this completed the poor fellow's discomfiture, so Master and the unhappy dog walked along the line the hare had taken until they came to a deep trench left by the peat diggers. On the near side of this the greasy newly-cut surface of the turf was scored by innumerable deep claw-marks where a dog had tried to scramble to the top.

'What happened here?' asked Master sternly, and the shamefaced cocker jumped down into the trench and from a patch of heather on the far side picked up the dead hare.

The poor little fellow, weighed down by the dead weight of a full-sized hare, had been unable to climb out of the ditch and there was no way round. He had hidden the hare hoping to be able to carry the matter off, but that terrible active conscience which no dog succeeds in suppressing had given him away at the last moment.

With regard to cockers and their popularity as household pets I have often wondered if it is considerate for people who do not shoot to keep this breed. Many of these poor little chaps, with nothing better to occupy their minds than the inspection of lamp-posts seem to be suffering from a sense of frustration, and there is something about the puzzled wrinkled look on their faces which suggests that all their natural instincts have been suppressed by the unnatural life they are forced to lead. For them the fireside only and the walk through the railinged park on a lead, with never an opportunity to bury their noses in the soft warm fur of a newly-shot rabbit and carry it proudly to Master.

During a partridge drive shortly after this war started the guns were lined up not far from a small house occupied by a refugee family from London and, as the first shots sounded, a delighted cocker spaniel, all flapping ears and wagging tail, put in an appearance. As it transpired later he had never heard a gun fired before in his life, nor was he aware that such delightfully scented things as

partridges existed, but his instinct told him what he should do, though his method of carrying it out would not meet the approval of a Field Trial umpire.

For the next fifteen minutes he raced up and down behind the line of guns, picking up birds and disappearing with them through a hole in the hedge, where he deposited them on his doorstep, returning hurriedly for more, Owing to shouting and whistling, vociferous protests by legitimate dogs on the delicate question of ownership, and the frantic attempts of the cocker's owner to retrieve his pet, the drive was not a success, many coveys of partridges managing to cross the line of guns without a shot being fired.

The reactions of the party to this unexpected interference with their sport revealed the fact that there were two schools of thought, representative respectively of the aforesaid fifteen millions and thirty-five millions. The first were extremely angry and could see nothing funny in the occurrence: 'People ought to keep their damned dogs under control,' and so forth. The latter category were only vastly amused, but their amusement was tempered by the thought that probably never again in his life would that enthusiastic little cocker experience such a gloriously happy quarter-of-an-hour.

A well-known dog expert in an article in *Country Life* gave it as his opinion that the dog had a higher standard of honour than the bitch, and I expected a furious attack on him by admirers of the female of the species; but he was allowed to escape unscathed so I imagine most people agreed with him. It has been my experience that when a dog decides to disobey orders he does so in a blatant open manner, so that usually he is detected at once, but the bitch will go about it in a much more subtle fashion and her artful wiles suggest a superior intelligence. This I do not think is the case as on the whole the dog has the better brain, but his standard of honour will not allow him to use it for the purpose of deceiving Master.

The old story of the Garden of Eden is reacted again and again in the canine world for, though the dog is more of a gentleman than Adam and does not excuse himself by saying: 'the woman tempted me', it is a fact that most of the very shocking incidents concerned

with sheep, chickens and pheasant rearing coops are caused by a bitch leading a dog astray. In this connection I heard a very sad story recently of a six-year-old bull-terrier, who lived in the country and who was absolutely reliable with every form of stock. Then a bitch of the same breed belonging to a sailor was given a temporary home, and the two animals struck up a great friendship, going off rabbit hunting every morning. At first they concerned themselves with legitimate game only, and then one unhappy day there was a raid on a flock of sheep which cost the bull-terrier's owner over £100, but the saddest part of the catastrophe was that the farmer had shot and killed the dog, who had never looked at sheep previously, whilst the real culprit escaped.

I am always nervous of a dog and bitch hunting combination, as when harmless sports fail the inventive brain of the bitch is apt to think of something new, and the dog, like every male, being anxious to show off, will agree against his convictions. My own Scottie had a bitch of his own species staying with him recently, and despite every precaution the pair managed to get away from me almost every day during the before-breakfast walk, whereas previously the Scottie would have considered it against all traditions to desert me. The various ruses they employed to accomplish this suggested that the bitch had spent the best part of the night thinking over the details of the movement which led to my deception. The plan varied from time to time, but a particularly common one was the discovery of a non-existent rabbit in a bush; a series of yaps from herself to let me know they were at close quarters with their quarry and thinking of nothing else; and then there was a sudden silence, which meant they were streaking away under cover of the hedgerow to their favourite wood. A point about these deceitful manœuvres was that the mythical rabbit was invariably located in a spot where, owing to the lie of the land, I could never obtain a view of the absconding couple to holloa them back, and it was always the bitch who was the instigator, as frequently I saw her nudge the dog with her nose or prod him with her shoulder when she thought the moment had arrived for the get-away. The dog on these occasions always seemed to be

uncertain of himself—as if, in fact, he did not think he was playing the game.

I recall, however, an occasion when two dogs behaved in a most lamentable fashion, and I imagine this was a case of fifty-fifty. We were staying with some friends in Palestine and took our Scottie with us, and there he met a most delightful person, a fox terrier. They liked each other from the first, and the terrier as host did the honours of the place, taking the Scottie round the purlieus of the house to show him all the sights and interests. Purlieus is an awkward, almost unpleasant word, but I think it describes adequately the immediate surroundings of a Palestinian house on the fringe of the desert.

The two dogs trotting around together reminded me of two small boys from different prep. schools, meeting for the first time and telling each other magnificent lies of their prowess in school and on the playing fields. In the course of their strolls they flushed a cat, and our Scottie said, 'Ha! a cat, and what do you do to a cat in Palestine?' The fox terrier said, 'I kill 'em on sight—not one escapes me.' To which the Scottie replied: 'So do I in Sinai; I tear 'em to bits,' and they did.

This is not a very nice story, but it is quite true. The point—if there is a point—is that neither of the dogs was a cat-killer. They both regarded cats as creatures well below the salt, of course, but not such bad fellows on the whole, and after all a chap has to put up with them in the house. The incident happened through this regrettable habit of boasting, followed by the necessity of proving one's words.

On the whole dogs are not good hosts because their natural jealousy causes them to resent the advent of another animal to the home circle. The old friends, whom they meet daily by the wayside with wagging tails and every sign of pleasure, are greeted usually by a rising hackle and a stiff-legged frigid walk if the acquaintance should pass through the gate to the garden, and a low growl of warning is added if he should enter the house. If, however, a visitor should pass the acid test, and it is decided he has no designs on the

affections of Master, it is most amusing to see the host doing the honours of the place and no doubt exaggerating its charms and possibilities.

Many years ago when I lived in a very 'varminty' district in south Dorset I owned, or was owned by, a quartette of bitches—an Irish terrier, a Scottie, a springer spaniel and a fox terrier, and a tough hard-hunting pack they were. One day there came to stay for the week-end a friend from London, and he brought with him a rough-haired terrier dog whose experiences of life were confined to urban streets and lawns in Regent's Park. Our dogs were delighted to meet him though I suspected there were some sniggers behind his back at his Londoner's ignorance of the usual manifestations of the countryside and, sensing this, he endeavoured in every way to overcome his limitations by proving he was as good a countryman as any despite his upbringing.

He was taken round the place by the pack and shown the rat earths at the back of the stable. Here he blew down the holes with greater gusto than any of them, and offered to dig the rat out while they waited. He was persuaded that this was a useless endeavour as the holes went under the brick floor of the stable, and that the rats could only be dislodged by the assistance of that very unpleasant but useful creature, the ferret. They introduced him to the ferret in his hutch later, and warned him that this animal was sacrosanct—no decent dog ever killed a ferret however much they might dislike the species.

Then they took him to a gorse and bracken patch and put up a rabbit for him, and the Londoner, enjoying himself immensely, imagined by this time he was an expert on all sides of life in the wild. After a glorious but futile twenty minutes I saw my pack get together, confer for a moment and lead their new friend off to the small wood adjoining the shrubbery. There was something about their excited manner as they surrounded him which was suggestive of a crowd of schoolboys about to spring a booby trap, or some form of practical joke, on a new boy, and I realised the nature of the plot when I saw them go to the badger's earth which was occupied. The

bitches knew all about the badger and the badger knew all about the bitches on the principle of:

*Daniel in the lions' den, the lions' den and Daniel,
Daniel didn't care a damn for the lions, nor the lions a damn for Daniel.*

That is to say the dogs were in the habit of going down the earth most days of the week to bark at the badger from a safe distance, whilst the badger no doubt ignored them except for a glint in the eye and a baring of his teeth.

They led the trusting cockney to the earth and let him have a sniff at the strong badger odour which emanated from it and, though I have never seen a dog wink, I feel certain that something which takes the place of a wink in the canine world was exchanged between them. Then they went down the hole one after the other saying as they came out: 'No, I can't kill him. You try,' and finally they made way for the London terrier, and told him to go to it.

The poor unsuspecting fellow led on by the heartless females went down the earth with a rush and next moment there came from the depths volleys of barks, shrieks and growls. When some three minutes later the terrier emerged from the hole he had a nasty bite on the nose, a damaged paw and a torn ear, and after this he seemed to regard his new friends in their true light—a bevy of deceitful little bitches.

Practically everyone who reads this chapter will have suffered from the unpleasant experience of being 'let down' whether he be soldier, sailor, official or schoolmaster, or a member of any profession where one is responsible for putting up a good show on those occasions when 'high-ups' and inspecting staff come round to see for themselves. Perhaps I have been particularly unfortunate in this respect, as I have served so much of my time in the Orient, and in the East one's life is almost a staircase of 'let-downs'. I was once asked officially if there were any locust swarms in my Province and, having affirmed that not a solitary insect had been reported by the police in its whole length and breadth, one of the largest swarms in history came over and blotted out the sun and landscape. Another

episode of the same nature occurred when, having told a 'Big Noise' that I had succeeded in establishing peace among the Beduin tribes (a silly statement to make), we came over the brow of a hill in the car and ran into the middle of a first-class battle with about five hundred men engaged and bullets flying everywhere; and this less than a week after my two most responsible sheikhs had given each other the kiss of peace. It would seem it is always one's most reliable employees and best friends who let one down, and this being the case the dog plays his part of course, being something more than human in the magnificence of his efforts.

Every man who shoots knows those unhappy occasions when one has been invited to an especially big day more on account of the working ability of one's dog than one's own prowess with the gun, and one's canine friend commits every crime known, together with two or three quite new inventions to suit the case. A particularly amusing case of this sort occurred when a springer spaniel, after four seasons' hard work during which he proved himself a tireless worker and a first-class retriever, found himself on the unemployed list so far as shooting was concerned owing to a variety of circumstances. His master was promoted to another and more strenuous post, he married and produced an heir, and with his new responsibilities could find no time for the gun. The spaniel, finding time hanging heavily on his hands, therefore appointed himself as nannie in the nursery—a post for which the kindly accommodating nature of the breed fits them, and for two years he never heard a shot fired.

Then at last the hard-working Benedick was persuaded to go out for a day walking up grouse and was asked to bring with him his dog whose retrieving fame had spread abroad. Out of the first covey which rose Master dropped a bird, but the old dog looked puzzled for a moment as if he had forgotten his piece. Then, being urged on, he raced forward, stopped by the fallen grouse, sat up and begged!

Another story concerns a syndicate of eight who owned a grouse-moor in the north of Ireland and each one of these eight guns was a dog owner and a dog lover. The dogs were of all varieties—

Labradors, black retrievers, Irish water spaniels and the field type—and in the eyes of their masters they were perfect in every way.

One day early in the grouse season, after a pleasant morning with everyone happy and talkative, the syndicate were at lunch and a chorus of dog adulation started with each gun holding forth on the merits of his own animal. Steadiness to both fur and feather was the keynote of the pæans of praise—fur in particular—and apparently there were gathered together on that Irish moor eight of the luckiest shooting-men in the British Isles, for they were the owners of eight superlative dogs which had no equal anywhere.

The guns went out for the first drive after lunch to the butts, which were placed along the shoulder of the moor, sloping from No. 1 to No. 8. Just before the black dots of the first covey appeared on the skyline an old mountain hare came lolloping down a track in the heather in front, and as he passed No. 1 butt, out popped No. 1 paragon of all the virtues and gave chase, putting Puss into top gear. Opposite No. 2 another eighth wonder of the world dashed out giving tongue and joined in. At No. 3 the same thing occurred and so on right down the line, with every butt contributing its specimen of perfection singing 'It's a fine hunting morn', until there were eight 'free from chase' dogs hunting the hare like a pack of beagles into the haze of the distance.

It was one of those rare occasions when eight men all think alike, for at the post mortem held later on the disgraceful episode the keynote of every remark was, 'If it hadn't been for your damned dog—!'

Chapter Two

Fact and Fancy

For generations, one might say almost from the days of Izaak Walton, fishermen have been accused of mendacity and gross exaggeration, so that at the present time to admit that one is an angler is to accept also the cognomen of liar. This, I think, is unfair, as there are so many other pursuits the participants in which lie much more heartily than those of fishing, and the angler's little flights of fancy are not, as is popularly supposed, dictated by conceit and connected with his prowess, but usually with his carelessness and lack of judgment, despite which he has managed to get a fish. If I were asked what class of man or woman it is which tells systematically the biggest lies, having excluded professional share pushers and dog breeders, I would say authors. I do not know if it is because so many of them deal with fiction, or what the cause may be, but if one attends a literary cocktail party one hears on every corner of the room some almost unknown author telling a story of the size of the advance he has just obtained from his publisher or the number of his books sold recently, which everyone knows is quite untruthful. Such lies, however, are not amusing; neither are they interesting.

As a fisherman my best story, which I suppose is classified as a lie, is based on carelessness combined with a certain amount of real bad fishing. It happened on one of those hopeless days when, with one solitary exception, there was not a trout moving on the whole stretch of water; and of course *that* trout was out of reach from the bank, I was not wearing waders, and it was a bitterly cold day. The fish was nymphing rather than rising, and he was also a traveller. Every three minutes he would set out from a patch of weeds, bulging and rising over an area of twenty yards, and occasionally providing a glimpse of his shapely two pound body. He was doing this so consistently that I considered him worth a bout of rheumatism, so I waded in to casting distance and began to fish for him. As he was moving the whole time, and moving rapidly, I never knew whether he had seen

my fly and ignored it, or whether I had missed his actual position by several yards.

I cast over this fish for an hour without success, wandered up stream again and again looking for a rise, and came back once more to the traveller for another attempt. At 5 p.m. in disgust I made my final cast, which was ignored as usual, and, my fly having sunk, the line dragged down stream. I reeled in with the cast towing through the weed patches, and just as the end of the line reached the top of the rod there was a suspicious splash almost between my legs. At first I thought it must have been caused by my fly box or some portion of my gear falling into the water. Then came a sudden pluck at the top of my rod, and I saw my line hareing off down stream. Some fifteen yards ran off, and then came that distressing feeling of nothingness which I half expected from a self-hooked trout, and the line came limply back. I waded ashore in a fury, stuck the rod in the bank and proceeded to pack up my gear, leaving the rod to the last. About five minutes later I reeled in to find the trout had never left me, and was in fact lying contentedly in a weed patch awaiting the next move. After all this gross carelessness I did land the fish, and he did weigh 2 lb.

Actually this experience is by no means unusual, as frequently fish will settle down quietly and ponder over the matter if the strain on the line is relaxed. My wife, when trolling for barracouta in the Gulf of Akaba, hooked a very big fish which tore off about 200 yards of line and leapt high in the air, and this ended the matter apparently as the line came trailing back without resistance. She reeled in disgustedly, but left about ten yards of line and trace trailing in the water. Half an hour later, when we turned the boat in to the shore, the line went travelling straight on, for the big barracouta, with the hooks well home, was swimming contentedly in our wake.

Passing over a fishing yarn I heard recently of a man who was reduced to about one yard of thick gut of his last cast, and was about to give up in despair when he hooked and landed a small trout with fly and complete cast attached to his mouth, I come to the story which capped it and which I do not believe of the fisherman who went

to try for salmon on an Irish river with a friend. They had to travel some forty miles by car to the water, and in the hurry to get off early in the morning one of the fishermen forgot his rod, and so with gaff in his hand followed his friend along the bank disconsolately. With the third or fourth cast his friend hooked something very peculiar, and landed a small salmon attached to a complete and very expensive outfit—a 12-foot rod, reel, line, cast and fly—and with this bit of unusual flotsam the bereaved angler had the best day of his life!

If I continue to tell any further stories of this description of fishermen I shall upset my own contention that, as regards lying, they are not in the first flight, and so we will now deal with other pursuits. One hears some most improbable stories in the gun-room after the day's shooting, but everyone who uses a scatter gun knows that ballistics will not abide by any hard and fast rules, and that there would seem to be no limit to the range at which game can be killed, and no fluke which is impossible. When one hears of one cartridge accounting for a brace of grouse, a rising snipe and a squatting hare, one must perforce believe it, for others can tell of equally mysterious shots. Moreover one reads of them constantly in correspondence columns, and they tend to become rather boring when such things as buffalo and guineafowl figure in the results achieved by one discharge.

An amusing shooting story concerns the late Mr. Charles Radclyffe, of Hyde, Wareham, who was interested in albinism. He liked to have white blackbirds and sparrows about his house, he valued some white fallow deer in his park, and he was particularly interested in a white pheasant in one of his woods, warning guns on no account to shoot it. One day when he was posting his party round this wood before the drive, he said: 'Now there's a white pheasant in this wood and he's not to be fired at. If any of you fellows kill him you need not expect to be invited to shoot at Hyde again.'

He took up his own position at the end of the line, where the birds came over very high and right in the eye of the westering sun. He was shooting well up to his usual form, which was extremely good, when a particularly difficult and high bird broke out of the wood,



Landed a small salmon attached to a complete and very expensive outfit.

swopped across the glare of the sun's rays, to crumple up dead in the air.

'Not so bad for an old 'un?' he said to his loader.

'No, not zo bad, Zur, but you won't be able to shoot at Hyde no more. That was your old white pheasant sure enough—and dead as mutton!'

Then there is the story, which I believe is based on fact, of the man who had shot regularly with an old friend in Scotland every year on August 12th. This invitation had been extended every autumn since their schooldays together, so that the guest had come to regard it as a certainty, and in consequence made no other arrangements. One year, however, the expected invitation did not arrive, and there was great disappointment, and a feeling of annoyance as the opening fortnight of the grouse season had been wasted.

One day shortly afterwards the two old friends met in London and there was a suspicion of coldness.

'I know exactly what you are feeling, old chap,' said the owner of the moor. 'I didn't know how to explain as it has all been so awkward.'

'Well, I do feel you might have written to let me know that you didn't intend to invite me, to enable me to make other arrangements.'

'Yes—yes, I know I should have done that, but as I've said it was all so difficult. It was due to Nicholls, the butler, and you know what Nicholls means to me. I simply could not face life without him.'

The friend admitted that Nicholls was a most exceptional man in every way, and worth his weight in gold.

'Well, as I have said it was all through Nicholls. The damned fool got the parlourmaid into trouble, and my wife was simply furious about it. She said she was going to find out who was responsible. Well, old chap, I know you'll understand—I couldn't possibly lose Nicholls, could I? And your name was the first one to occur to me.'

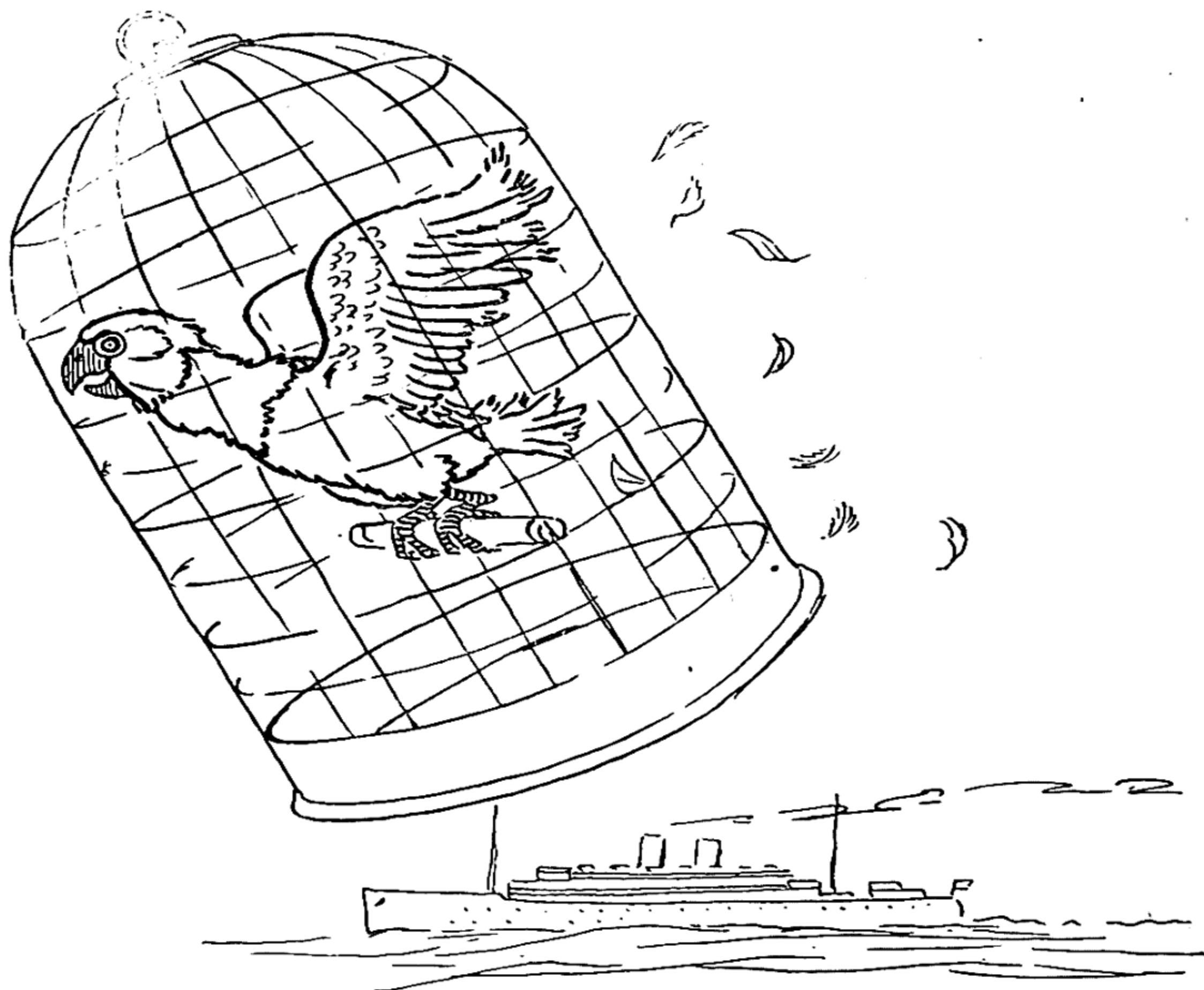
We had a very fine liar in our regiment some years ago, but his lies were in a different category from most, as he told them solely to amuse, and presumably did not expect anyone to believe them. He

had served on the West Coast for many years, and one of his longest and best stories concerned the death of a big chief in his district, who as a mark of esteem left to the raconteur in his will four hundred wives and two hundred and fifty concubines. The story of the disposal of these six hundred and fifty widows would fill a whole volume, and my memory fails me as to the exact and lurid details.

Another of his was about a man who came out to the West Coast to try and discover some trace of his father, who had been lost on a Niger exploring expedition some thirty years previously. During his search for information and clues in the various villages he acquired one of those big drums which the West Coast natives use for signaling. One day whilst using the drum as a side table at 'sundowner' time he told our friend about his father, who had been a sailor, and who had tattooed on his chest H.M.S. *Victory* under full sail, with beneath it a portrait of Lord Nelson with a black patch over his eye. At this moment he upset his whisky and soda, fetched a cloth to mop it up, and while rubbing off the liquid from the drumhead he removed some of the accumulated dirt of years and there, plain for all to see, was revealed H.M.S. *Victory* under full sail, and beneath it Lord Nelson with a black patch over his eye. The parchment of the drum was made from his father's skin!

His most improbable story, however, was connected with a parrot on a voyage home from Australia. When telling this he mentioned always that Dame Nellie Melba was on board at the time, and 'if she were here she would bear out every word I say'. Unfortunately Dame Nellie Melba had been dead for some years. Apparently there had been heavy weather for many days, so that the bored parrot was kept below in his cage. When eventually the gale dropped, the clouds disappeared and the sun came out, the bird was brought up on deck. He was so delighted to see daylight and feel the warmth of the sun again that he opened his wings and, getting a firm hold of his perch, flew off, cage and all, in the direction of Australia, and was never seen again.

There is a type of liar not altogether unknown, and in fact rather common, who tells other people's stories as having happened to



Getting a firm hold of his perch, flew off, cage and all.

himself. I suffered from a Colonel who did this on principle, and it made life most confusing. While on a desert patrol between Siwa and Mersa Matruh during the last war we came across Mt. Iskander, in the heart of the most forbidding desert. I dislike particularly 'first white men and women', and all those who lay claim to the distinction, as I have had to put up with so many of them in the days when I was a Frontier official, but I believe we *really* were the first Europeans to go up this mountain since the B.C.'s.

The legend about the mountain is that, when Alexander the Great was in Egypt on one of his campaigns, he went across the desert to consult the famous oracle in Siwa Oasis. The party lost their way, and when they were at the last gasp, Alexander, to try and find his

bearings, went up to the top of the mountain (later to be called after him), and whilst there flushed a black crow which flew off in a south-easterly direction. Alexander's caravan followed the line the bird had taken, and came eventually to Siwa, safety and water. When we went up the mountain some two thousand odd years later we flushed on the top a brown-necked raven, which flew in a south-easterly direction, and when recounting the experience later it made a very good story when one added that the bird was undoubtedly a descendant of the 'crow' Alexander had flushed.

At a dinner-party in Alexandria at which I was a guest about a year after the occurrence I heard my Colonel tell this story as having happened to him. The second-in-command, who was also at the table, would not let it pass, however.

'No, no, Colonel—we can't have that,' he said; 'everyone knows that that is Jarvis's lie.'

Another story of a similar nature, which was also related at an Alexandrian dinner-party, concerned the evacuation of the European residents from the small oasis of Wadi Natrun during the Egyptian rebellion of 1919. I was then Commandant of Eastern Libya, and when the whole of Egypt blazed up after the war with almost complete destruction of the railway system in the Nile Valley, the odd fifteen to twenty employees of the Salt & Soda Company at Wadi Natrun were cut off. They were in no danger whatsoever, as the Arabs of the desert had not taken any part in the rebellion, and in fact disapproved of it, but the military authorities were worried about these Britons, and so I was given some twelve cars by the R.A.S.C. to go across the desert and bring them back. This I did without any trouble, except from the European staff themselves, who resented hotly being turned out of their homes for no reason. However, everything connected with deserts and Arabs has inevitably a spice of romance, danger and news value about it, and the story of the 'rescue' went round.

Some time later at a big dinner-party in Alexandria an R.A.S.C. officer started to tell a story of a most gallant rescue he had made of beleaguered Europeans in an oasis, and the tale was so stirring that

ordinary conversation stopped and we all listened to him. It was a tale of glorious deeds against odds and incredible dangers, and I was amazed to discover that the place from which the rescue was made was Wadi Natrun. Then one of the diners interrupted:

‘Wadi Natrun?’ he queried. ‘I thought you were the man who brought the people out of there, Jarvis?’

‘Well, I thought so myself,’ I said, ‘but it would seem I must have dreamed it.’

The following, which many people may know, is a very mysterious story, or lie. It has been related to me by three different persons as having happened to a near relative of theirs, and I imagine others have had the same experience. Here it is:

A man was staying in an old house in the south of Ireland and late one night he awoke to hear wheels on the gravel outside. He peered through the window, and saw below, opposite the front door, a hearse drawn up with four horses and nodding black plumes. As he pulled back the blind the driver of the hearse looked up and his face, was most sinister and suggestive of a skull. He pointed with his whip to the hearse behind, and said: ‘Room for one more.’

Some months later the narrator of the story was in London on the top floor of a large departmental store, and when he went to the lift it was apparently full and door was just closing. The liftman opened it again and said, ‘Room for one more,’ and when the subject of the story saw the liftman’s face it was the skull-like countenance of the Irish hearse driver. He stepped back in horror, and at that moment the lift crashed down into the basement!

A good story, and if I had heard it only once I might believe it.

The famous story of the Home Guardsman who told a nice little private lie to a friend about going over Germany as rear cockpit gunner on a bombing raid, and who, before he could do anything about it, found himself front-page news, and guest of honour at a celebration luncheon with a presentation cheque for gallantry, proves how easy it is to slip a little lie, and how difficult it is to catch it again.

As an instance of the little lie which escapes and achieves great

magnitude there is the true story of the 'cricketer' from Ireland. Years ago a great friend of mine had a nephew from the south of Ireland to stay with her during his first vacation from Oxford. While recounting his adventures at the University he said he was very good at cricket and was playing in his College eleven. It was apparently a quite harmless, light-hearted little lie, as his aunt, like most aunts, knew nothing about cricket; but the next day she met me and said, 'Oh, *dear* Jack is simply splendid at cricket—*do* get him a game.' As I am about as good at cricket as most aunts, and as no self-respecting cricketer would be seen speaking to me, all was well for a time and no harm done; but fate was in a contrary mood that day and just before lunch our regimental cricketer came up to me in the Mess, and making it perfectly clear he was not referring to me in any way, asked if I knew of a good man for a two-day match at a well-known country house in the south-west of England. I said I knew the very man he was looking for.

'He's good, I suppose?' our cricketer said. 'The opposing team are pretty hot—all up to second-class county form—and there are two professionals with them.'

I assured him that the man I had in mind played for his college at Oxford, and when the name of this college—which has a reputation for cricket—was mentioned all was well.

'Oh, that's quite good enough. See that he is on the 9.30 a.m. to-morrow.'

When I arrived with the news that I had a game for *dear* Jack at a two days' match I was overwhelmed with thanks from the entire family, and the only one who did not seem to be highly delighted was *dear* Jack himself. It appeared he had no kit of any kind, nor his cricketing gear, and, immediately the news of this shortage spread, the village and countryside mobilised as one man to help. White flannel trousers and shirts sufficient for the whole eleven were sent to the house; cricket gear was brought in bags with bats, which had been used at Eton v. Harrow, Oxford v. Cambridge and Little Puddford v. Carton Magna; and never in the history of the human race have kind friends worked so hard and unselfishly for such an un-

worthy object. But as the kit rolled in *dear* Jack's gloom and depression deepened.

When the dog-cart came round at 9 a.m. sharp the following morning to take the cricketer to the station he could not be found, and when he was unearthed eventually at 9.15 all chance of catching the train had gone. Then up roared and spluttered one of those new-fangled machines, the motor-car—it was the year 1906—driven by a newly-arrived guest full of help and kindness, and *dear* Jack was bundled into it with his kit. There was another frantic attempt to lose the train at the station when the cricketer went off to buy a paper at the last moment, but willing and active searchers caught him by the exit at the last moment, and shoved him head over heels into the moving train, where he was caught by the other members of the eleven.

The sequel occurred three days later, when the regimental cricketer, scarlet with fury, put his fist under my nose and demanded to know why I had stuck him with 'that rabbit'.

'Wasn't he any good?' I asked.

'Any good! he'd never even played the game in his life. He didn't know how to face the bowler, or any of the positions in the field. If that is your idea of a joke—making a fool of me and the whole eleven—it isn't mine.'

On looking back over the episode through the vista of years, and recalling the feelings aroused by the little lie which got loose, I can only vaguely imagine the intense hatred *dear* Jack must have entertained for all the well-meaning fatheads who short-headed him at every turn, and refused to allow him to escape when he had made it so obvious that he wished to do so.

The last improbable story is one of my own, and concerns the early days of our Frontiers Administration in Egypt when some fertile brain at Cairo H.Q. thought of the use of carrier pigeons to facilitate communications between desert outposts and their governorates. The staff officer, Brown, who was responsible for the scheme, and who was burning with zeal, arrived at the governorate at El Arish in Sinai with crates of pigeons, and despatched at once by the

ordinary camel caravan to an outlying post, Kuntilla, three pairs of pigeons together with a long letter containing the fullest instructions as to their management.

Kuntilla was garrisoned by two sections of Camel Corps commanded by British subalterns, Smith and Jones, and when the mail arrived by the camel caravan they pounced of course on their private letters first.

'Anything from Governorate?' asked Smith, as he finished his last letter.

'The usual bilge,' said Jones; 'demands for idiotic returns, some mistakes found in our arithmetic, and a long and no doubt idiotic screed from that ass, Brown, which I shan't read until I feel in the mood for it. Oh, and some kind friend at the Governorate has taken pity on us and sent us a crate of six pigeons.'

That evening before sunset a small pillar of dust snaking across the desert to the north, materialised eventually into Brown's two-seater. Later when Brown was put into a chair with a drink he plunged into details of his new pigeon-post scheme, but was met by looks of blank astonishment.

'But I explained it all in my letter—the pigeons I have sent are your breeding stock, and from them you will raise at least twelve young birds for the future. Haven't you had my letter?'

At this moment Jones, murmuring something about ordering dinner, left the room and Smith, following him, found him opening a tin of bully beef in the kitchen.



... found him opening a tin of bully beef in the kitchen.

'Good heavens,' said Smith, disgustedly, 'can't we put up something a bit better than that for dinner? I thought I saw the cook making a pie.'

'Yes, you did,' replied Jones, 'but I decided to scrap that at the last moment because of the contents.'

'Why, what was in it? Chikor partridge as usual?'

'No, pigeons,' said Jones, shortly, 'six of them, and to give them to Brown to eat now would savour of gross tactlessness. Get out that book on poultry you bought last leave—I want to look up a disease from which pigeons die suddenly in a hot climate.'

Chapter Three

Faithful Servants

One of the most difficult problems with which we have had to deal in Great Britain of recent years is that concerning one's domestic staff, and the effort of maintaining some show of efficient service with a type which too often has been taught to believe that all work is degrading, particularly that connected with the house. The recruiting of one's servants from people who have to be persuaded to accept a post as if they were performing some gracious and unselfish act is particularly aggravating to members of the middle-class who have had to struggle hard for their own existence, and to accept positions in unhealthy foreign countries or unattractive manufacturing towns—or starve. And when one's staff has been collected it is a trifle disconcerting to find that the garden-boy and the kitchen-maid are giving notice and getting married, because by a little simple arithmetic they have discovered that by both going on the unemployment dole together they will be rather better off than they were before.

In the East one is free from many of these annoyances, and if there is one thing that keeps a man serving on the wrong side of Suez long after he has reached the age when he might retire, it is the thought of exchanging his silent, well-trained *safragis* (house-boys) for impudent chits with primitive ideas on cleanliness and very advanced ones on independence.

In Egypt one is very well served indeed, but I will not attempt to make comparisons with other lands, as all exiles are very intolerant of the suggestion that any country but their own adopted one can produce domestics to compare with theirs. Those who have served in China, for instance, are absolutely convinced there is nothing to touch the Chinese as a house-boy; the Anglo-Indian laughs at the idea of anything approaching perfect service outside India; Ceylon is quite certain she has reached perfection; while Egypt knows in her own mind that a good *safragi* cannot be excelled in any land.

At the same time it is no use pretending that all *safragis* are para-

gons of virtue and honesty. A bad servant in Egypt is quite as bad as anything one gets at home, and from time to time one meets the entirely brainless type with which it is impossible to do anything. After trials and tribulations, however, one gets together a staff which is as near perfection as one can obtain in this very imperfect world of ours, and having done so there is no fear that they will want to go off and better themselves, or give notice in order to get married. The servant in Egypt is essentially a creature of routine, and once he has found a master and mistress to his liking he shows not the slightest desire to quit their service.

As a matter of fact the servants of Egypt are not Egyptians at all, but are recruited from the Berberines who live in the vicinity of Assuan, and who at the age of eight are brought by their fathers to Cairo and Alexandria to learn their trade. Some villages in this area supply *safragis*, or house boys only, while others specialise in *syces*, or grooms, and the boys, directly they are old enough, are carried off to serve their apprenticeship in the kitchens and stables of the metropolis.

The home life of the Berberine must be a very queer and disjointed one, as he departs from his home at the age of eight to work in Cairo; he returns when he is about twenty to get married, and, having done so, leaves his wife behind and goes back to the city. From time to time, at odd intervals during his service, he pays fleeting visits to his home to see if he has any family—his visits are so infrequent that he never achieves a quiverful, but nevertheless does quite well considering all things—and in his old age he packs up his kit and returns to the village by the Nile to farm the land he has bought with his savings.

He is a naturally cheerful person and extracts quite a lot of quiet fun out of life, but I am not quite certain what his wife gets out of it. As I have never met a Berberine wife I cannot say with any certainty, but I know they exist as their sons have been produced for me to see, and I have also frequently seen in the village Post Office brown-paper parcels containing my tea and sugar addressed to them, so that no one can say the Berberine makes an entirely thoughtless husband.

Servants in Egypt are obtained by a variety of means: some are inherited, some achieved, and some are thrust upon one, but, unlike England, there is no question of calling at registry offices, driving miles to interview reluctant and coy maidens, or competing in the open market by offering them seven nights out a week, a latchkey, and the use of the family car. All one has to do is to whisper that one is in need of a cook or *safragi* to be besieged the following day by a crowd of domestics proffering chits from past employers. These are couched in a variety of strains, from the wildly enthusiastic to the coldly indifferent, and in the old days it was no uncommon occurrence for an applicant to offer proudly a character which read: 'Ahmed Gharbo is a liar and a thief, and a spoiler of good food, so if you employ him you deserve all you get'; but indifferent servants have become wise to this simple method of writing a nice wordy testimonial for thoroughly unsatisfactory service, and now take the trouble to have their chits translated by the village letter writer.

A very large number of cooks expect to make a small percentage out of their bills by adding a small fraction to everything that they buy. Most people tacitly recognise this so long as the percentage is reasonable, but it is as well to query an item occasionally to show that an intelligent interest is being taken, otherwise the usual five per cent., like the anticipated dividends on some gold shares, may advance by leaps and bounds to 100 per cent. or more. At the same time if your cook wishes to make his five per cent. and you do not agree, you may as well retire from the service, give up games, and devote your whole time to watching him and checking his accounts, and he will then probably make an additional five per cent. as a protest.

A marked characteristic of Berberine servants is the way they can rise to the occasion and cook for a multitude of guests arriving half-an-hour before dinner, and the unprecedented depths to which they can let you down when you have made every arrangement and attended to every possible detail to entertain some rather important personage.

On one occasion when I was alone at El Arish, and living rather

sketchily in the interests of my figure, a passenger-carrying aeroplane made a forced landing in the desert to the south, and I had to break it to the cook at 7 p.m. that in an hour's time there would be nine people to dinner. The average English cook, when faced with a situation like this, would throw her apron over her head, burst into hysterics, and give notice on the spot. My cook smiled sweetly, said 'At your service', asked for the key of the store-room and withdrew; and we sat down an hour later to a perfect meal consisting of artichoke soup, a large fish like a cod with appropriate sauce, roast turkey, and fruit and cream—and the only thing that had come out of a tin was the fruit. I believe that several of the officials in the place went without dinner that night, but on occasions like these one's servants are quite ruthless in their manner of acquiring the necessary food.

The other side of the picture was a very carefully-prepared dinner party when the food and drinks had been discussed and every minor detail worked out carefully—and the meal was a flop from the word 'go'. The soup was stone cold, but the *safragi* counteracted this and warmed up the guests by pouring liqueur brandy into the sherry glasses. The small silver toast-racks had been forgotten, and instead the second *safragi* brought round pieces of bread in an old cracked plate and ladled out bits to the guests with a dilapidated iron spoon assisted by a large black thumb. Champagne was then poured into tumblers to wash down a raw saddle of lamb that had apparently been basted with paraffin, and the *grande finale* was provided by the cook, who, jealous of the success achieved by the *safragis* in entertaining the guests, sent round a magnificent fruit tart, held up in the centre by a weird, repulsive object which turned out to be an empty Keating's Powder tin.

As a third side to the picture—and it is of course in the Orient only that a picture can have three sides—I recall an occasion when I had been notified that a party of twelve or more air-borne passengers from Palestine would be arriving for dinner on a certain date, and the news coincided with my return from snipe-shooting on the Damietta marshes when I had some thirty couple of birds with me.

At Port Said I bought pounds of steak and kidney, together with four dozen oysters, and from these exceptional ingredients my cook achieved the largest snipe, kidney and oyster pudding which has ever been seen outside 'The Cheshire Cheese', and it is doubtful if even this famous restaurant runs to snipe as an adjunct to this substantial delicacy. At half-past seven, as the *safragi* came in with the tray of *mushrabat* (drinks), a wire arrived saying that as the aeroplane was late the passengers would not be landing at El Arish. Therefore at 8 p.m., I, one small man, sat down to dinner and helped myself to a small spoonful of the largest and finest pudding the world has ever seen. In these coupon-ridden days I cannot think of the episode without the tears coming to my eyes.

Another trait of a few of the Berberines is their capacity for smashing. I am not referring so much to china and glass, though I am willing in this respect to back a real butter-fingered *safragi* against any kitchenmaid England can produce, but more particularly to solid and more or less unbreakable articles. They can transform heavy Sheffield plate candlesticks to very passable imitations of crumpled rose-leaves, huge brass pots they will flatten out as if they had been placed between steel rollers, and I once had a tubercular worm of a house-boy weighing about seven stone who, in putting up two iron bedsteads, snapped half-inch steel bars as if they were carrots and twisted iron frames like the shoots of a vine. The same man, incidentally, could not lift a suitcase into a railway carriage without falling flat on his face.

I had a servant once who replaced every breakage by the simple expedient of going to my subordinates and asking them to lend me glasses, coffee cups, and other articles. Very foolishly they did not like to mention it to me, as they thought quite possibly it was a playful little habit of mine to supplement my household ware by indiscriminate borrowing. They therefore submitted to this impost, until one day an Egyptian officer wrote me a note to say he was extremely sorry he could not lend me one glass as I had already had the rest of his dozen—and then Ahmed left my service unhonoured and unsung.

Generally speaking, the Berberine servant is an honest man according to the Oriental standard, and whatever may happen to the property of one's guests, the belongings of the man he serves are sacrosanct—at least up to a certain limit. There is such a thing in the East, however, as losing an article by right of prescription, which means that, if anything is left unused and unnoticed for any length of time, it is apt to be estreated. Stolen is too harsh a word to use, as the process of disappearance is so gradual. Articles of furniture or household utensils of any kind are immune from this unwritten law, but if, for instance, one leaves an old camera, field-glasses or gramophone in an odd corner for a year or so without use, this fact is carefully noted by one's servant and the article in question therefore goes into the primary stage. This means that though it is not touched a very careful watch is kept to see if any notice is taken of it. The second stage then follows, and the object is removed for six months to some other part of the house, and if called for it can be produced after a short search. The tertiary stage—the period of which is six months in common with the other stages—consists of the temporary removal of the article from the house to the servants' quarters. Any time during this half-year the owner is allowed the right to call for it, when it will be found in the most unlikely spot such as the engine-shed or the cistern-room; and what is more the owner will be made to feel in some mysterious manner that he was the fool who put it there. If, however, no claim is made during this final six months the article is definitely absorbed and will never be seen again. This is not regarded as stealing, but the relieving of the owner of the house of unwanted lumber which might be appreciated by others.

On the whole the Berberine is a good-natured, friendly creature, and as a general rule one's staff get on very well together. If a serious *zaal* or quarrel should start, however, it is as well to make up one's mind at the beginning which of the two is the least indispensable and discharge him right away, otherwise the unfortunate householder will find that he has been cast for the part of a neutral in the unending war which will ensue, and nobody likes being used as a battlefield. The whole aim and object of the two combatants, once hostilities

have been declared, is to antagonise the master against his opponent, and the best way to do this in their opinion is to see that the whisky is left out of the kit on a seven-days' trek, or to arrange for a petrol-tin to leak into a Stilton cheese, and other atrocities of this description, which they hope fondly will be blamed on to the other man. After a very short time the master gets extremely tired of being the 'whipping boy' in every stage of hostilities, and the best solution to my mind is to award a fine to the culprit who is responsible for the disaster, and to double it in the case of the 'innocent' man, who has discovered the omission and reported it with such ill-concealed glee. The odds are a hundred to one that he has connived at the situation, and in any case was sufficiently aware of it in time to have avoided it.

There is a totally different type of servant that one acquires in Egypt, and that is one's personal orderly or batman, known as the *morasla*. He is a soldier, policeman, coastguard, or a member of whatever force his master commands, and he has been selected with the greatest care by his employer as being the best possible man the corps can produce. The peculiarity about the *morasla* is the wonderful and long-suffering devotion he inspires in his master's heart and the intense loathing and contempt he arouses in that of everybody else! We can none of us understand how it is that our brother officers can put up for one moment with the horrible, insubordinate and dirty oafs that they have chosen as their personal servants. One hears on all sides, for instance, that Smith Bey is a first-class man and extremely good at his job, but he must be the worst possible judge of character as no one in his senses would employ that insolent brute, Mohammed, whom he regards as a paragon of all the virtues.

I write with first-hand knowledge and some feeling on the subject, for my own *morasla*, Abdul, was easily the best-hated man in Egypt. In the Province of Sinai the intense loathing he inspired was beyond belief, while in Cairo when I went to stay with friends it was broken to me gently that, though I myself might be welcome in the house, they would esteem it a favour if I could dispense with the services of Abdul during the period of my stay. Their cooks objected to Abdul



... taking pot-shots at kitchen clocks with my revolver

taking charge of their kitchens and showing them how to cook dinners, they disliked him taking pot-shots at kitchen clocks with my revolver, and they took it more or less as a personal matter when Abdul said that the brown polish provided for shoes was *zai zift* (rubbish) and not at all the stuff he was accustomed to. I can imagine no one better fitted to break a long-standing friendship than Abdul, and the fact that he did it with the best possible intentions did not make it any the less difficult.

No ordinary man can inspire general detestation of this description, and there is no question about it—Abdul was not an ordinary man, as everything he did was extraordinary and unexpected. It is a little difficult to make it quite clear why I came to engage Abdul in the first place and, having done so, why I continued to employ him for years after it had become apparent that he was an object of hatred among my officials and something very far from *persona grata* among my friends, in addition to being a trial to myself.

I first met Abdul on a camel patrol on the Sinai frontier near Rafa.

It was a bitterly cold night, blowing great gusts and raining, and what annoyed me more than anything else was the fact that there was not a scrap of firewood in this particular part of the desert. Sinai has not much to recommend it, I admit, but one of its good points is an abundance of scrub wherever one chooses to camp for the night, and nothing makes such an entirely satisfactory fire as dry desert scrub. Rafa, however, is the exception to the rule, and being intensely cultivated all wood has disappeared years ago. It looked like a chilly and cheerless night with only tinned food for dinner; and then out of the gloom appeared a couple of walking haystacks, which materialised into two camels laden heavily with vast bundles of scrub. A young policeman, Abdul by name, learning that I was annoyed at the absence of firewood, had made a tour of the surrounding country, bringing in the Arabs' landmarks, which in this part of the world take the form of a long pole bound round with masses of desert bushes.

I spent a very pleasant night after this with a brightly-blazing fire in front of my tent and ate a well-cooked dinner. My peace was slightly disturbed from time to time by a series of altercations in the back premises—apparently various landowners had turned up to have a few words about the removal of their landmarks, a little matter which worried the patriarchs of the Old Testament in the same part of the world—but they were so successfully handled that I was not called upon to deal with the situation. From what I heard I gathered they were all 'sons of dogs' and the 'offspring of dissolute mothers', so probably deserved what they had got, and in any case Arabs have nothing whatsoever to do all day, and ample supplies of scrub were available in the desert five miles away, only waiting their gathering and fixing up as landmarks. This in any case was how it was explained to them.

At that time I had no *morasla* as I was new to the province, and was looking over the rather unpromising material in search of a man with initiative and energy—two qualities that I rate very highly in a personal servant in the East. It struck me that a young policeman, who could on his own responsibility rise to the occasion like this, must

have certain attributes with which the curb applied from time to time might prove invaluable, and so I engaged Abdul on the spot.

I had made no mistake about his energy or his initiative—they were both abounding and unfailing, and frequently very disconcerting—and later a third quality became apparent, and this was his intense loyalty to me and my wife. It is said that no man is a prophet in his own country and among his own kin, but this does not apply to Egyptian *moraslas* and certainly not to Abdul. In Abdul's eyes I ranked just junior, but not very much, to His Majesty the King of Egypt; and as regards intelligence and other qualities I was classed as a Deity. It was this unfailing loyalty on all occasions that I found so disarming; and when it became apparent that this very desirable quality, combined with a conspicuous lack of tact on all occasions, had so estranged him with every officer and non-commissioned officer in the Sinai Police as completely to ruin his future, I had no alternative but to keep him on in my service, if only to protect him from his enemies. As one of my officers used to say, a desert hare surrounded by every falcon, fox, jackal and hyæna in Sinai would have a better chance of existence than Abdul if ever he returned to the police as a duty private—and this was no exaggeration. Often one hears a private who has been brought up on some charge urge in proof of his innocence that 'Sergeant So-and-so had got him fixed and was waiting on him'—and Arab N.C.O.'s can 'fix' people and wait on them just as well as their European colleagues—in fact, I think they are willing to wait much longer. And so Abdul remained in my service long after I had decided that he was most unsuited in almost every way for the work of personal orderly, and his noisiness and quarrelsome attitude with the rest of the servants had made our lives a burden.

Quite early in his service with me I began to have a suspicion that Abdul's brain was definitely patchy. That is to say, there were days when he showed the brilliance and foresight of a Cabinet Minister (I am not at all sure if this is a very good simile, for many of our Ministers have shown neither, and one of them when war was imminent, handed over the Irish ports in return for nothing), while on

others he was so incredibly stupid that one desired to murder him, but his stupidity was never of the dull and vacant type that is inexcusable. Everything he did was performed with snap and vigour, and he would black brown shoes and iron trousers with the creases down the seams with all the energy and certainty of a valet to a dressy duke. Here again I think I have chosen a very bad simile, for I do not think there is such a thing as a dressy duke: all those I have met look as if they were valeted by their under-gardeners.

Actually there was no question at all about his brain's being slightly disordered, for I discovered afterwards that insanity ran in his family, and he had not improved matters by twice bringing his head into forcible contact with iron structures. On one occasion he dived off a quay at Suez into a steel lighter instead of the water, and some years later his camel ran away with him and went under the iron railway bridge at El Arish. At least the camel went under successfully, but Abdul did not. The fact that he was supposed to be exercising our Scotch terrier at the time and was holding him on to the saddle possibly accounted for the fact that he was unable to duck his head under the girders. The question, however, arises as to why Scotch terriers should be exercised on camel-back—such a procedure would never occur to anyone but Abdul.

I decided finally that Abdul was not quite as other men when I detailed him to carry out a little secret service work for me. I had received a confidential letter from the Commandant of the Palestine Police informing me that an Arab wanted for murder had been reported as hiding with a relative of his, a corporal of the Sinai Police stationed in El Arish. It would not be very easy to find out if this was true or not, as the houses of the inhabitants of the town are built on the lines dictated by the rules of the harem and are all surrounded by ten-foot mud-brick walls. It is extremely bad form—almost a direct insult, in fact—for a man to enter the yard of another without knocking loudly first as he might possibly surprise the lady of the house cooking bread over a fire with her face uncovered, and great shame would be the result. Therefore, unless I exercised considerable guile, the only way I could discover if there was a strange man

living with my corporal was by means of a proper search party which would surround the house first and, if the information proved to be incorrect, more than a possibility, I should have 'blackened my corporal's face' and destroyed his dignity for all time in the village and in the police force.

It struck me in my innocence that Abdul might be just the man to help here, so I asked him if he knew the corporal well enough to call at his house without the preliminary banging on the door, which would warn absconding murderers as well as unveiled wives. Abdul said this was quite all right—they were on the most intimate terms and he could walk into the house at any time. I then told Abdul what I wanted to know; if there was a strange man in the house and to find out at once without arousing any suspicion. The man was wanted for murder and at the very first hint that we knew of his existence he would be off.

'Therefore,' I said, 'just call at his house on some excuse—a present of vegetables or a sitting of eggs—have a look to see if there is anyone there, and come back and tell me. Whatever you do, be most careful not to let them think you have called for a purpose.'

An hour later I was walking through the town and saw a small crowd of boys and youths following a queer figure creeping along in the shadow of the walls, with its head bent and shoulders hunched in the approved American sleuth-hound gait. It was a very fine piece of impersonation and at a hundred yards you could see what it was meant to be—a first-class film 'G'-man on the track of murderers. It was Abdul, and to make things more noticeable he was dressed in his full uniform—kit he had never worn since he had been my *morasla*—hanging from his belt was an enormous truncheon from those we keep in store to be issued during emergencies, and in two holsters in the front of his belt were my pistols, a large Webley revolver and a Browning automatic. Needless to say, every single man in El Arish with the slightest thing on his conscience was out of the town like a scalded cat within five minutes of the appearance of this startling apparition—some, who had nothing worse against them than failure to have their children vaccinated, running fifteen miles without stopping.



A queer figure creeping along in the shadow of the walls.

On another occasion during the Bairam holiday—the great Mohammedan festival of the year—the Commandant of the Cairo Police came to stay with me in a quite unofficial capacity, and on the morning of the feast-day itself, when all the officials and officers in their best clothes were paying ceremonious visits to each other, I found it necessary to go down to my office to show my guest some new maps I had. I told Abdul to see that my room was opened up, and an hour later walked across the find the whole police and Camel Corps force drawn up in line as a guard of honour, the clerks rushing about in their office clothes, and everybody busy at work with about fifty per cent. more energy than is normally the case in El Arish. It appeared that Abdul in a state of frantic excitement had burst in on the sub-governor at breakfast, and in my name had ordered the great feast-day of the year to be cancelled, a strong-as-possible guard of honour to assemble, and everybody to be at work as usual in honour of the Commandant of Police, who incidentally is the last man in the world to insist on any formality of this description, and who desired nothing more than a few days of perfect peace in El Arish, away from parades and functions of all kinds.

Abdul, not to put too fine a point on it, was a very good example of a jack-in-office—‘a proud man drest in a little brief authority’. This is a very common type among the lower orders in Egypt, where everyone longs with an intense longing to be in a position where he can issue orders in a lordly way and generally ape the manners of the Pashas. If you engage a boy at ten shillings a month to look after your chickens he has in a very short time so worked up the importance of his job that it is impossible for him to carry on single-handed, so a *wakil* or assistant has to be engaged at five shillings a week to help him. Your original boy will then wear the remains of somebody’s old *tarbush* and purple sock-suspenders, and become one of the ruling classes. He will shout orders to his *wakil* in a peremptory and menacing manner and never soil his hands again. This is bad enough, but at the end of six months the *wakil* himself will develop a Pasha-like complex and demand a *wakil* to help him—and like the fleas it goes on *ad infinitum*. Abdul, however, was so intensely regal

that he did not require a private *wakil*—in his opinion the whole world was his to command and order about.

One of his weak points was keys—he never seemed to realise what a key could do and what it could not do. For instance, he lost the key of my gun-case and when I went on leave to England he borrowed a key that would fit from someone in El Arish, locked the case, returned the key to its owner, and sent me off to England with the gun, with the result that when I turned up at a partridge shoot with a locked case and no key I had to wrench it open with a tyre lever.

The following year when going on leave he locked up all the suitcases at El Arish and left the keys behind. On this occasion I had packed myself, and, though I say it who should not, the organisation was wonderful. There was one large case, which contained all the kit I should require in the country in England; another held my London clothes; a third was devoted to articles required for the voyage; and a fourth—a very small one—had toilet gear, pyjamas, and the one or two things necessary for the night at Port Said. This was the only case to be opened at the hotel, and the rest were intended to go on board the ship direct. When I went up to my room to change for dinner—it was a ghastly hot, sticky night—there was no Abdul. A search was made, and in half-an-hour he arrived simply bathed in sweat. He had in his hand about twenty bunches of keys of all sizes, from those big enough to lock garage doors to minute ones designed for jewel-cases. I asked him where my keys were, and he replied instantly and almost threateningly that these were mine. Abdul was the quickest and most emphatic liar in the world—the greater the emphasis the bigger the lie—and as I did not wish to make things too hot for him in the next world I never encouraged him to prejudice his chances further by arguing about the obvious. The keys were of course not mine, but belonged to various of my friends in Port Said, and Abdul had obtained them by delivering peremptory messages in my name. Anyway, out of the odd five hundred keys he had collected (I wondered often if their owners ever got them back) he managed to unlock all my cases and I went down to dinner more or less consoled.

Unfortunately the shock of forgetting the keys had upset the queer mechanism of Abdul's brain and put it in reverse, and when I went up to my room to get a few hours' sleep before boarding my ship at 4 a.m. I found that every single thing I possessed had been unpacked and put away in wardrobes and drawers as if I were going to spend my whole leave in Port Said. In the clammy stifling heat of a Mediterranean summer night I had to repack completely with many omissions, finishing just in time to go on board in the half-light of dawn.

Abdul's mendacity was of two varieties—a loud and emphatic lie to get himself out of trouble and a light-hearted and blissful disregard of the truth for no apparent reason. A good instance of the latter type was the story of the man-eating gazelle of Lahfan. The gazelle in its wild state is, I suppose, easily the most timid creature in the world, and the mere sight of a man is sufficient to send this small antelope bounding away at the rate of 40 m.p.h. There is one little family of them that lives at Lahfan, just south of El Arish, which I protected for years, and as the result they have gained a certain amount of confidence in the harmlessness of human beings. One day in the summer I passed in my car a small patch of millet, and out of the corn walked seven gazelle which had been feeding on the green shoots. Instead of galloping off in terror they strolled out of the cultivation and stood watching me from a piece of high ground, stamping their feet with annoyance at being disturbed. This was sufficiently aggressive for these meek little animals to be very amusing, and both Abdul and I laughed heartily at gazelle daring to be impertinent. When my wife came back in the autumn we happened to pass a gazelle at the same spot and I told her what had happened there during the summer. Abdul was sitting at the back of the car and he understood sufficient English to know what I was saying.

'Yes,' he said, excitedly, 'and after you had gone on leave the owner of the millet went to drive them off and they attacked him, knocked him down and gored him severely with their horns.'

We both laughed so immoderately at this appalling lie that Abdul thought he had better qualify it a trifle.

'The man wasn't very well at the time,' he added, 'and the gazelle noticed that he was weak and miserable, so that is why they did it. Of course they wouldn't dare to attack a healthy man in that fashion.'

Abdul was essentially a robust and straightforward liar, and he had no use at all for the little white lies and prevarication we all indulge in to avoid hurting feelings. If it were a question of hurting feelings he rather preferred to do it, as that was one of the few occasions when the bare truth was essential. For instance, during an exploring expedition in the Western Desert we were so short of water we could not shave, and I commented unfavourably on my sprouting beard to Abdul.

'Yes,' he said, 'I don't wonder you don't like it. It's worse than anybody else's, as it's white and makes you look an old man;' and when one is over forty-five this is the last thing one wishes to hear.

His real masterpiece of brutal truth concerned a visit to the Monastery of St. Catherine in Southern Sinai. We had arrived with a large party at the Monastery after seven days' hard camel-trekking through the mountains, and the first evening the Archbishop called on us at the Rest House to ask if we would like to attend a service in the chapel the following morning. Nobody felt very keen on listening to a service in Greek, but it would be very bad form to say so, and we therefore said we should be delighted and at what time should we attend.

'Four-thirty,' said the Archbishop; 'an hour before dawn.'

There was a silence which could be felt after this shattering announcement, for the one thing we had all been looking forward to after a week's marching at dawn was a long lie in bed the following day.

'Isn't there a later one?' somebody asked in a weak voice.

'There is another at six-thirty,' said the Archbishop, firmly; but at this moment Abdul, who had been handing round coffee, tapped him on the arm familiarly.

'Need they go at all?' he said in a menacing manner. 'They don't wish to; they all wish to stay in bed tomorrow morning.'

It is impossible to describe the scene that occurred after this brutal

disclosure of the truth and nothing but the truth. The Archbishop protested that of course no services were compulsory, while we affirmed almost with tears in our eyes that we wished to attend every service at every hour of the day. The upshot of it was, however, that a special service was arranged for us at the reasonable hour of 10 a.m. and we had nothing but Abdul's blatant crudity to thank for it.

Chapter Four

Along the River's Bank

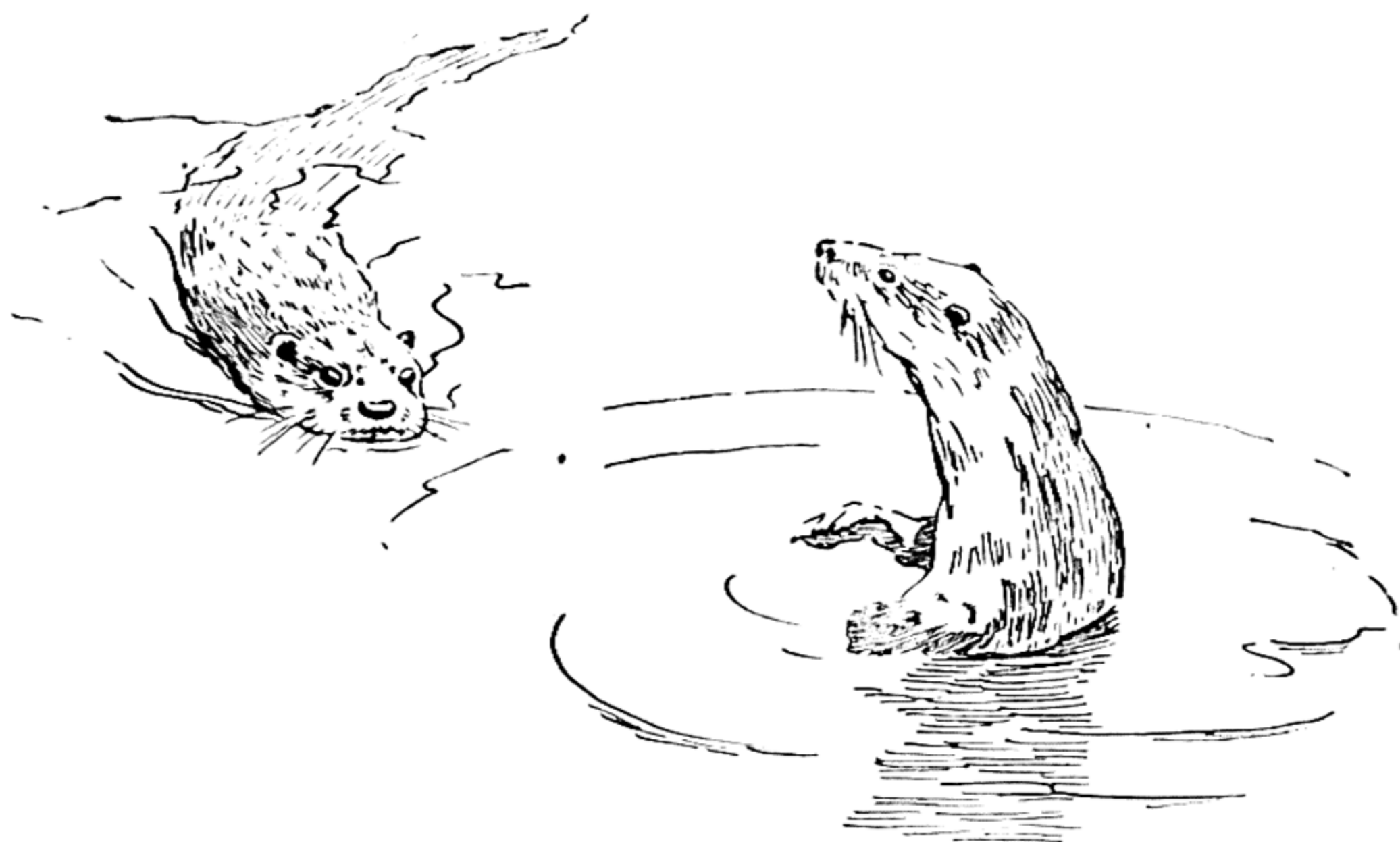
The fascinating side of fishing as a hobby is the very exceptional opportunity it provides for observing wild life going about its ordinary occupations. This adjunct to the work in hand is not possible with any other sport. One may glimpse interesting nature manifestations occasionally when hunting, but there is seldom time to see the act through to the end, for hounds, a whipper-in, or one of the field will usually drive the actors away. Nature study while shooting is fatal, and if one is at all concerned with the extent of the bag, one must cut it right out, for it is when one is watching the movements of a rare fire-crest or lesser spotted woodpecker that the first big covey comes silently over the hedge-row in front, or the brace of pheasants passes down behind the line. I used to shoot duck in Egypt with a very fine shot indeed, but the drawback to him as a reliable gun was that he was a keen ornithologist, and if there were rare waders or falcons moving over the marshes, he would come in with an empty bag and a box of unused cartridges.

The fisherman, however, without detriment to the size of his basket, can always find time to watch a bird or beast, and as wild life, like *Punch's* idiot of many years ago, apparently regards the angler as a harmless lunatic, they are much more confiding and fearless when a man has a rod in his hand than when he is carrying field glasses for proper observation. One of the advantages of being a dry fly man, as opposed to the wet variety, is that one is not constantly obsessed by the urge to continue casting in all the corners of every run for some chance feeder one has missed, and the dry fly man, when there is no evidence of rising fish, will do better by sitting down with his pipe in a likely spot watching for some movement in the water. It is then that the apparently deserted river's bank wakes to life again and all the small birds, beasts and reptiles, which had taken cover when the angler was on the move, now come forth and show themselves. A water rat swims slowly out to a patch of weeds,

makes a landing on it and has a short meal of salad; a moorhen with family of fluffy balls appears from nowhere in particular; a duck with a dozen ducklings emerges from a bank of reeds; and a grass snake crosses the stream rapidly, giving a demonstration of how a sea serpent swims.

Although one sees visible proof of the otter's presence on many waters in the form of half-eaten fish, their tracks through the reeds, and scored-out claw marks up the earth banks, it is seldom that one is able to view the gentleman himself. I have occasionally seen, and frequently thought I have seen, otters when fishing after dark, and one night when casting over a large pool for sea trout a pair of the animals put in an appearance and started to work through it for salmon. One otter was right at the bottom of the pool where it shelved out over pebbly shallows, while the other was stationed at the top where the water was deep under over-hanging rocks. Apparently the down stream otter was working the pool like a setter, and driving up to the other, for I could see the ripples of the water moving from side to side, and every half minute he would put up his head and give his low whistle to his mate which meant obviously: 'Look out! He is coming up on your right.' Unfortunately they noticed my presence before they got their fish, and I missed the chance of seeing an otter kill.

The first time I took my very new wife to fish in Ireland on a mountain stream and left her to whip a pool, while I tried farther up, she had an exciting experience. A large animal came out of the water on the opposite side, turned to look at her savagely and then walked into a patch of gorse. Describing it afterwards she said it looked like a lion cub, as it had a mane or ruff round its neck, which stood out when it turned its head, and this, making allowances for the excitement caused by the first sight of an otter in the wild, was a fairly correct description. I saw the animal myself later and there was just a hint of albinism about him, for his fur was ginger brown with a particularly long and thick growth round his neck like a ruff, but he was not quite as big as a lion cub. The story of the Irish mountain 'lion', however, went the rounds of the regiment, and my wife was



I have occasionally seen otters when fishing after dark.

never allowed to forget it, being nick-named the 'Lioness' in consequence. While clearing out a mass of old documents in the loft the other day I discovered on paper, yellowed by the years, with ink faded by age, the following penned by the battalion poet:—

*No matter how my work may press
I can't forget the Lioness,
Who stalked King Leo in his lair
Somewhere in Erin, say Kildare.
And as I think I always wish
That I might see her catch a fish;
So some fine day without a doubt
I'll live to taste a speckled trout,
Which fell within her fatal ban
As you did too, my Little Man!*

An animal with which every fisherman is well acquainted is the weasel, for this little carnivore is apparently particularly fond of the various field-mice which frequent the river bank. These small

creatures, owing to dangers from the air in the form of kestrels and owls, like to have water laid on in their basements so that they can drink in safety, and for this reason there is always a large population of them on every river bank, with a veritable maze of runways, several of which lead to the water.

A quite common incident when one is seated and waiting for a rise is the sudden appearance of a weasel from underground. He pops out of a hole within ten yards of the fisherman, a delightful fairylike creature in bracken red and cream, but a ruthless, determined little murderer despite the charm of his exterior. He is invariably hot on the track of something, for his small black nose is working vigorously, and as it is obvious he works by scent alone it seems remarkable that apparently he is not aware of the appalling stench of human being which must be impregnating the air for a radius of some fifty yards. I cannot say for certain that the smell of man is appalling to the wild beast, but I have definite proof that it is very overpowering, for one's ordinary household dog can follow the line one has taken over a half-hour old scent, and we have most of us experienced deer and other big game winding us over a distance of five hundred yards or more. Therefore one can only conclude that the hunting weasel must be aware of the all-powerful scent of man, but possibly he meets it stale or fresh wherever he may go, and so takes little notice of it.

Alternatively his olfactory organs are concentrated on vole smell and his dinner to the exclusion of everything else. One can easily understand that if a nose is working hard picking out a fresh trail over innumerable old ones it must be a most absorbing task, and a small brain has not much time to spare for other distractions.

Whatever the explanation the weasel, if the fisherman does not move, will work all round him. On one occasion a particularly confiding specimen mounted my boots and ran half way up my leg before he discovered his mistake. He was, however, in no way disconcerted for, after one look of withering contempt at the human face, he hopped off again and disappeared in the sedges.

The birds which the fisherman knows best are those engaged in the same pursuit as himself—the heron, the kingfisher and the

supper, a heron had come in confidently and very silently through the darkness and alighted in the hatchery. As the heron is not a nocturnal bird normally, night raiding was not expected, and presumably he had been having a heavy fish supper in peace for several weeks when I gave the game away unsportingly. The next time he came down to his night meal he met a charge of No. 4's.

Except in fry hatcheries, which are usually protected by wire-netting, the kingfisher does little harm, for there are so many thousands of fry hatched naturally every year, of whom only a small percentage reach maturity. That the toll taken by the tiny kingfisher is of no account. The ordinary man as opposed to the angler might think that the kingfisher is a rare bird, but those who frequent river banks know that his population remains steady and consistent what-

dipper—though possibly the food of the last named is more particularly caddis worm and water-shrimps than small fry. The heron is a bird in which the angler can see no redeeming qualities, and it is most difficult for the confirmed bird-lover to make out any sort of case for him beyond the fact that he looks very striking in his french grey suit while standing in the shallows of a river. When he is not spearing all the finest trout in a carefully preserved stream, frequently killing those which are too big for him to swallow, he is out on the marshes after frogs, and therefore it is impossible for his advocates to say that his good deeds outweigh his bad, as, except when they bothered the Egyptians at Moses' suggestion, no one has had any complaint to make about frogs.

I do not know if there are any statistics to prove the weight of fish which a heron will consume in a day, but considering the size of the bird and the diligence with which he fishes all the hours of daylight I should imagine that two pounds would be a very conservative estimate. As the heron's fishing beat on a southern chalk stream is seldom more than half a mile, and frequently less, with his comrades from the heronry on stretches above and below, it means that every half mile of water is losing over seven hundred sizeable trout in a year. If one values a 1 lb. trout at 2/- it would indicate that one heron

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trout, it will always have an occupant, no matter how many casualties are inflicted. The dining-room of Major C. E. Radclyffe's house in Dorset, the Hyde, looks out on to one of the best stretches of his river, the Piddle, and dinner in the summertime at Hyde is always a disjointed meal for, just as the fish course comes on, Major Radclyffe jumps up.

'I'm damned if there isn't another heron up there by the rhododendrons, and I shot one only yesterday.'

This means a drive round in the car over the small bridge to the west, a short stalk along the bank under cover of dense rhododendrons, a report of the gun, and a return to the fish course, which has not improved during one's absence. I will not say this happens every night of the week, but it seems to occur whenever I am there, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that on this stretch of the river at least ten herons go to their last hunting grounds between the fish and the joint during the summertime.

At the hatchery at Ibsley, on the Avon, there are usually two keepers at work all the hours of daylight, and so the herons make a very rare appearance here, for the shot gun is always on tap. Nevertheless the big trout in one of the carriers were constantly disappearing, and on two nights running, when I was fishing the upper reaches, and some half an hour after the keeper had gone off to his

supper, a heron had come in confidently and very silently through the darkness and alighted in the hatchery. As the heron is not a nocturnal bird normally, night raiding was not expected, and presumably he had been having a heavy fish supper in peace for several weeks when I gave the game away unsportingly. The next time he came down to his night meal he met a charge of No. 4's.

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One sees him usually, however, when he comes down stream a couple of feet above the surface like an iridescent blue-green streak, and he has come and gone so rapidly that sometimes one is uncertain if he happened or not. He reminds me in this respect of the green flash of the sun, which occurs sometimes in clear weather at sunset, and which I have seen, or thought I have seen, many times, but I would not be prepared to swear to it. The kingfisher when going down or up stream is always in a tearing hurry and, like most people in a hurry, I think he feels very irritable. He does not expect to see an angler by the bank and it gives him a start, which annoys him, for he swerves and utters a peevish squawk as he passes.

One day while fishing I saw that happen which I have always expected would occur sooner or later. A kingfisher whizzing down

stream at 40 m.p.h. met at a nasty corner another bird coming up at the same speed. Both were in the middle of the road—or river—and were over the white line, but each skidded and swerved on one wing, as it were, and a collision was just avoided. The episode was far more human than ornithological, for both birds cursed loudly and continued their flight up and down stream shouting over their shoulders: 'Why the hell don't you keep your side of the road!'

The dipper is a bird which the chalk stream fisher of the south sees seldom, and when I argue with a moorland or mountain river angler on our respective water as to the size of trout and extent of bags, I admit it is check-mate and defeat when he mentions as adjuncts to his fishing the kingfisher *and* the dipper against my kingfisher only. I think the sight of the jolly dipper, who has obviously not a care in the world, just puts the finishing touch to the perfect day; he is to be seen on ever likely pool and sparkling run, and his little squeak of alarm as he shoots under the old stone bridge is pure affectation, for actually he is not in the least bit frightened.

I saw a solitary specimen on the Piddle last year—the first I have ever noticed in Dorset—and I imagine he had come from farther north on a prospecting expedition in search of new quarters. As I did not see him again I suppose he went back to his mate with a very adverse report. 'Perfectly hopeless, my dear: not a decent building site on the whole stretch of river. No ripply, pebbly shallows for caddis worms or shrimps and, worst of all, not a single rock in the middle of the stream on which a fellow can bob.'

Another bird friend of the river's bank is the barn owl, who, in the summer, usually before dusk, comes out to range the water meadows for field mice. One specimen I have known for over 40 years, but I cannot say if the bird I see today is the same as that of four decades ago or his son or grandson, but, if it is, the family likeness is very strong. I do not think I have ever stayed for the evening rise without seeing my old friend the owl drifting about over the meadows in that peculiar, silent, ghostly glide which is suggestive of something unbirdlike, or rather something not quite in keeping with the hours of daylight. As he passes me he turns his head to look—

when one comes to think of it the owl is the only bird that does this—and appears to say, 'Any luck?' From what I can see of his movements—his sudden swoops earthwards and his disappearance in the direction of the barn where he has his nest—I take it he does far better than I do.

On the whole we are very good friends, but I upset him on one occasion. I was getting through a gap in a rather high hedge hampered with my rod and net, and apparently I had trespassed on his right of way, for suddenly he appeared in the gap coming from the opposite direction and we nearly collided. I stepped back politely and allowed him to go through, but from the look he gave me as he passed, I realised that he was rather annoyed about the incident.

The various wagtails—pied, grey and golden—are met with every hundred yards of river, but the golden, a migrant, is commoner on northern rivers than south of the Tweed. They are in evidence particularly when the mayfly is hatching, but it has always seemed to me that the bird who enjoys the mayfly season more than anyone is the chaffinch. When these insects are fluttering down the stream the chaffinch forsakes his garden, woodland and orchard haunts, and from the riverside alders and willows makes quick dives and not too skilful swoops on the passing insects. He is not nearly so expert as the birds whose rôle it is to live on the flying insect and who resent his intrusion, but the chaffinch is an aggressive, cocksure fellow, and if he wants a thing he gets it.

If there is anything in the transmigration of souls and the possibility of being a dray-horse, Pekingese, mosquito or some other creature in the hereafter, I hope I shall not be a mayfly. It is a form of life that seems to offer the least reward and fulfilment, as after a dull, chilly existence at the bottom of a river for a year, wrapped up in a small faggot of twigs, one emerges into the sunlight for 'One crowded hour of glorious life' to find that one is allowed only two seconds as there is a scramble for one by innumerable chaffinches, swallows, wagtails, tits and terns, with something more than a two to one chance that a trout intervenes before one reaches the surface, or immediately afterwards.

With regard to the tern I have frequently, when taking a friend over to fish the Dorset Piddle, given proof of great wisdom, almost amounting to second sight, by saying as the car tops the rise a mile away from the river: 'Good—we will find the mayfly up today.' The explanation of this correct appreciation of the future is so simple and commonplace that it seems a pity to give away the secret and lose my reputation as a prophet, but if one sees the conspicuous white of terns flying in the valley below in May or June, it is a sure sign the mayfly is there also.

Incidentally this ornithological prophecy reminds me of other birds on another and very different river—the egrets on the Nile. When I was stationed at Kasr-el-Nil Barracks, Cairo, many years ago, I noticed that every evening at sunset a flock of white egrets went up the Nile flying about a foot above the surface of the water. About two hundred yards above the barracks is the lofty Kasr-el-Nil bridge and when the birds reached this they did not maintain their level and go through one of the arches as I expected, but suddenly swerved upwards and flew over the top. I noticed this happen on two occasions and on the third evening, when we were sitting on the mess verandah over our 'sundowners', I called a brother officer's attention to the egrets.

'I wonder if those birds will go through an arch of the bridge or over the top.'

'Oh they'll go through an arch of course', said the other when he noticed the height at which the egrets were flying.

'I don't think they will—I believe they'll go over it. They'll shirk going through an arch with people walking on the bridge.'

'I'll bet you anything you like they'll go under.'

'Right—we'll have a whisky and soda on it', and half a minute later the loser rose to go to the bell push. This is a toss with double-headed penny, which one can only try twice or three times within the regiment, but as there was always a variety of officers from other corps attached to the mess for short periods we found the egrets a certain source of free drinks. I pass on the tip to the present occupants of Kasr-el-Nil, for I have no doubt the egrets still fly up the Nile

at sunset as they did years ago in the days of my youth. If they do, depend upon it, they will not go through an arch.

A very local bird on trout rivers is the reed-bunting, with his rich brown body and neat black cap, but one will not find him unless there are reeds in dense clusters. One meets him usually when one is trying to make a short cut across a bend in the river, and finds to one's extreme annoyance that the black muddy water between the reeds is deep enough to come in over the top of one's gum boots. Just about the time one is damning the river in heaps, up springs a reed bunting and, hanging on to a tall bulrush, starts damning in heaps also, and this has the effect of making one feel thoroughly ashamed of oneself. Not only has one blundered into the privacy of a peaceful riparian dweller, but one has had the extreme bad taste to use bad language and criticise the surroundings of his domain.

The sedge-warbler—one of our commonest riverside birds—unlike the reed-bunting does not swear, but nags in an irritating manner. Everything upsets him, and it seems to me always that he is looking for trouble, and goes more than half way to meet it. As one wanders slowly and peacefully along the river's bank he starts nagging in the rushes twenty yards away, and continues his peevish chatter until one has passed out of sight. Then reluctantly he stops. He is quiet for only about two minutes. however, as almost immediately he finds something else to irritate him—a grazing heifer goes near his nest, the keeper walks up a side stream, or an aeroplane passes overhead—and it would seem that he manages to find something to upset him all the hours of daylight and most of the night.

I lost any affection I might have had for sedge-warblers through living in a house where the garden in front was separated from the main road by a narrow withy bed. This withy bed was about half a mile long, and every thirty yards of it harboured a pair of sedge-warblers—all of them very peevish and excitable, and of course the pair immediately in front of the house were more easily upset than any. Whenever a pedestrian, cyclist, or horse and cart passed along the road up would jump our sedge-warbler, start his persistent nag-nag-nag until the offending passer-by was out of range, and by this

time the next warbler in the ranks had taken up the song cycle, and so on down the road. The trouble was that they were just as vociferous by night as by day and, as a popular wayside tavern lay up the road a short mile, the warbler chat was incessant round about closing time. Sometimes in desperation I would hurl a stone into the withy bed, but this was fatal, as it annoyed my sedge-warbler to screaming point, and immediately the whole platoon of birds would open up drum fire on a half-mile front.

I have not included bulls among the wild life seen when fishing as speaking correctly a bull is not a wild animal, but a domestic one. This, however, is only the natural history ruling, and I have met bulls that are far from being domesticated. Owing to a disconcerting Dorset custom of running the bull always with the herd of cows, I have had the most excellent opportunity of studying the 'entire' male of the bovine species. My encounters have been so many that if I should 'dry up' as an author I should be able to earn my living as a *banderillero* in Spain, as I believe this is the fellow who annoys the bull and then dodges him. I am not a bull-fighter by instinct, and I have no desire to annoy bulls, but it is an unfortunate coincidence that the trout are always rising more freely on that stretch of river by which the cows complete with bull are pasturing, so I have to take my own chance.

Until one has actually tried it one cannot realise how difficult it is to make a neat and accurate cast over a rising trout when just behind one is a bull working himself up to a pitch of fury with low moans of rage. Every time one whips the line behind in the air to dry the fly the bull reciprocates by tossing a lump of turf in the air with his horns as an advanced model of what he proposes to do with an angler in the near future, and personally I find it very distracting. There is only one bright spot, and that is when one is fishing one sees so often trout rising, which cannot be covered from the south bank, but which would be easy from the north. As this would necessitate walking back half a mile to the plank bridge one decides to give the fish a miss in baulk, but the sudden appearance of the bull often obviates the long walk round by the bridge as, when one has



An apologetic cough caused me to examine the beast against whose solid withers I was leaning.

taken to the water up to the waist, one may as well go the whole way and cross to the other side of Jordan.

On one occasion, when I was arguing with the bull from the standpoint of a sandbank in the middle of the stream, the farmer and cowman came up and hit him some hefty whacks with something more than hazel wands. The farmer apologised, but said that I need not be afraid as he was a young bull and 'he ain't hurt no one yet'. I did not like that qualifying adverb 'yet', as every young entry has to make a start in life, and when the youthful shorthorn is looking for his first blood he is much more likely to choose a fisherman armed with an 8-ounce rod than a hefty cowman carrying a solid oak stake.

My last encounter with a bull ended on a quite peaceful note. The evening rise had just started with fish on the move the length of the stream, when, after milking, the farmer disobligingly let his cows into the field in which I was operating. They surged through the long grass in echelons of red, white and black, the greater part of the herd making for the actual bank of the river, and as this was the one part of the field in which I was interested I was loath to surrender my position.

The trout were rising so well that I dared not take my eyes off the water for a moment, and a big red animal and I advanced up the bank, almost shouldering each other backwards at every step like two peevish City men disputing a position in a 'bus queue. This continued for some fifty yards and, as I was giving away a lot of weight, I had the worst of every impact, my casting suffering in consequence, though I do not think my opponent miscued a single munch. Then suddenly I remembered the Dorset custom of the bull with the cows always, and thought I had better locate his lordship before an unfavourable situation developed. There were some thirty beasts in the field, but I could not detect him among them, and I had come to the conclusion that he must be an absentee that night, when a snort which sounded like an apologetic cough caused me to examine the beast against whose solid withers I was leaning. I heard later that he was a new bull endowed with a most placid and friendly nature, and I hope that he is blessed with many sons who take after father.

To avoid bathos a chapter should always end on a striking note, and this is not easy when one is writing of the pleasant, easy-going pastime of fishing and the fascinating creatures one meets; but there is one episode in my past which is not concerned with trout, or birds, or beasts, but which causes me to shudder whenever I remember it. I was a very young subaltern stationed in Guernsey at the time, and I had very little use for the island as there was apparently no fresh-water fishing in it. Then I met an old family of Guernsey folk, who dated back to 1066, when the Channel Islanders helped the Normans to conquer England, and discovered that they had a small stream on their land which fed a pond in which there were many large carp introduced some thirty years previously.

I was kindly given a permit to fish and caught several magnificent golden carp which our landlady, a Jewess, cooked most skilfully; and then one day the husband, a very aged bearded Jew who looked as if he had stepped straight out of the Book of Genesis, came into our room.

'Dat is very fine carp you catch, Mr. Captain. Ven I vas in Frankfurt my peoples tink the carp the best fish of all fish. Ve cook him mit vine—very goot. Here', and he waved his hand to indicate Guernsey, 'we haf a leetle club of Jewish men from Frankfurt, and if I could gif them a carp for dinner one night it would be very nize—very nize indeed.'

Well, I was sorry for the poor old Hebrew exile in a foreign land, and when I fished the carp pond a week later I brought back a 5 lb. fish to figure on a dish at the small Jewish club. The next time after that, when I went to try for the carp, my once kindly host in an atmosphere suggestive of the Arctic showed me a cutting from the local newspaper. It was headed, 'Rare Fish in Guernsey Market' and went on to describe how a carp of great size had been sold in the fish market at 1/6d. a pound, which had worked out at 7/6d. The circumstantial evidence against me was terribly strong; there was only one carp pond in all Guernsey, I was the only one fishing it, and at the time I was very impecunious. The story about the poor old Frankfurt Jew who had deceived me sounded terribly weak, and the more

I enlarged on his senility, his poverty and his general appearance, the more unlikely he seemed. One thing is certain—the true story, as is so often the case, did not convince, and in the Channel Islands I shall go down to posterity as the man who is given a day's fishing, and then goes off and sells his catch in the open market; and one cannot sink much lower than that.

Chapter Five

Oriental Oddities

No one can serve in Egypt for any length of time without coming in contact with that queer and interesting community, the *Qaribs*, and the longer one stops in the country and the higher one rises in the service, the more numerous and insistent they become. The *Qaribs* are not, as one might suppose, a distinct race like the Howietat Arabs or the Nubian blacks, for they may be of any nationality—Egyptian, Berberine, Arab or Sudanese, but whatever their breed they have one point on common, and that is they are the poor relation of one's staff, either private or official, and they all require employment and, what is more, insist on obtaining it.

The actual meaning of the word *Qarib* is 'near', and it is used as a colloquial expression to denote any relation or connection—for instance a brother is a *Qarib*, and so is a brother-in-law, an uncle by marriage, and a third cousin five times removed, but such relatives and connections do not become real *Qaribs* until they are out of work and in search of employment. In the past apparently all employment in Egypt was obtained by means of influence, and the big Pashas had to find employment for hordes of dependants, who in their turn were expected to find posts for their relatives, and so *ad infinitum*. The belief therefore persists that the very finest, and in fact the only possible, recommendation for a job is a word in the ears of the great, conveyed to him by a confidential clerk, favourite servant or groom.

The peculiarity about the Egyptians and their neighbours, the Berberines and Sudanese, is the manner in which they inherit, collect and acquire unemployed and unemployable dependants. The ordinary Coptic clerk, who obtains government work as a taxation cashier on the lordly sum of £8 per month, finds himself installed in this world usually with a very complete equipment of indigent relations, consisting possibly of a paralysed father, a mother, three quite unmarriageable sisters, a couple of out-of-work brothers, and

perhaps a ne'er-do-well uncle thrown in as a make-weight. Like the unfortunate worker bee, who toils all day to provide food for drones and immature queens, he accepts his fate uncomplainingly. It never seems to occur to him that he is loaded above the Plimsoll mark with encumbrances, for when he decides to take a wife to add to his responsibilities he does not select a relationless orphan or foundling, as one would expect, but chooses almost invariably a mate with a bed-ridden father, an idiot sister and at least four unemployed brothers, all requiring support. With some of the lower-paid officials this gathering together of dependants appears to be a craze or hobby like the collecting of stamps, butterflies and antique furniture; and they seem to vie with each other to see who can accumulate the greatest number and finest specimens.

Actually, of course, this tacit and uncomplaining acceptance of responsibility for all relatives is a very fine trait in the national character, and is one of the reasons why one hears so little about unemployment in Egypt. The people themselves shoulder the onus of providing for their dependants, and they thus relieve the State of the necessity of finding money for doles and outdoor relief, but like everything else of that nature it is grossly abused. It is a very common occurrence to find a very poorly paid clerk supporting three or four hefty male relatives, who, because they have received a smattering of education, consider themselves too superior to work with their hands, and who loaf about indefinitely, clad in European suits, waiting for some form of clerical employment which they can never obtain owing to the lack of qualifications—and the amazing part about it is that the little clerk apparently accepts his fate uncomplainingly. This does not mean, however, that he is not going to take steps to improve matters if an opportunity presents itself: immediately there is the slightest prospect of a vacancy on one's staff one hears about it—and hears early in the morning, moreover.

It may be that a whisper has spread that Mohammed Effendi employed at Stores is about to be discharged as unfit, or that an increase is contemplated in the employees in the Tantah Town Council. Nothing official has come through yet, and probably no news will

be received for a month or more, but on rising in the morning one has the feeling of something untoward in the air—a rustle or stir of birds in bushes such as one experiences before a thunderstorm. On looking out into the garden one notices lurking among the trees and shrubs several red tarbushes, and when the *safragi* (house-boy) brings in the early morning tea he coughs discreetly, and, deciding that one's temper is fairly safe, mentions the fact that a vacancy is occurring shortly, and that in his opinion Ahmed Effendi's brother would fill the post adequately. He has probably received five piastres for this, with the promise of fifty more if the job materialises, so it is worth while risking a slight display of irritation.

As one comes down the steps of the house into the garden the lurking tarbushes mobilise, and applicants rush forward and shove into one's hands lengthy screeds extolling their relative's accomplishments. The whole way to the Governorate one collects further documents, until finally the attendant orderly has to carry the accumulation. At the office one's own particular clerks come in one by one, and having dealt cursorily with the work of the day, remind one that a vacancy may shortly occur and that they also possess *Qaribs* of astonishing merit who require placing. The pathetic part about the whole business is that precisely the same state of affairs, concerning the same vacancy, is taking place in twenty different offices in other parts of the country, so that the prospect of obtaining the post for any particular applicant is to all intents and purposes hopeless from the start.

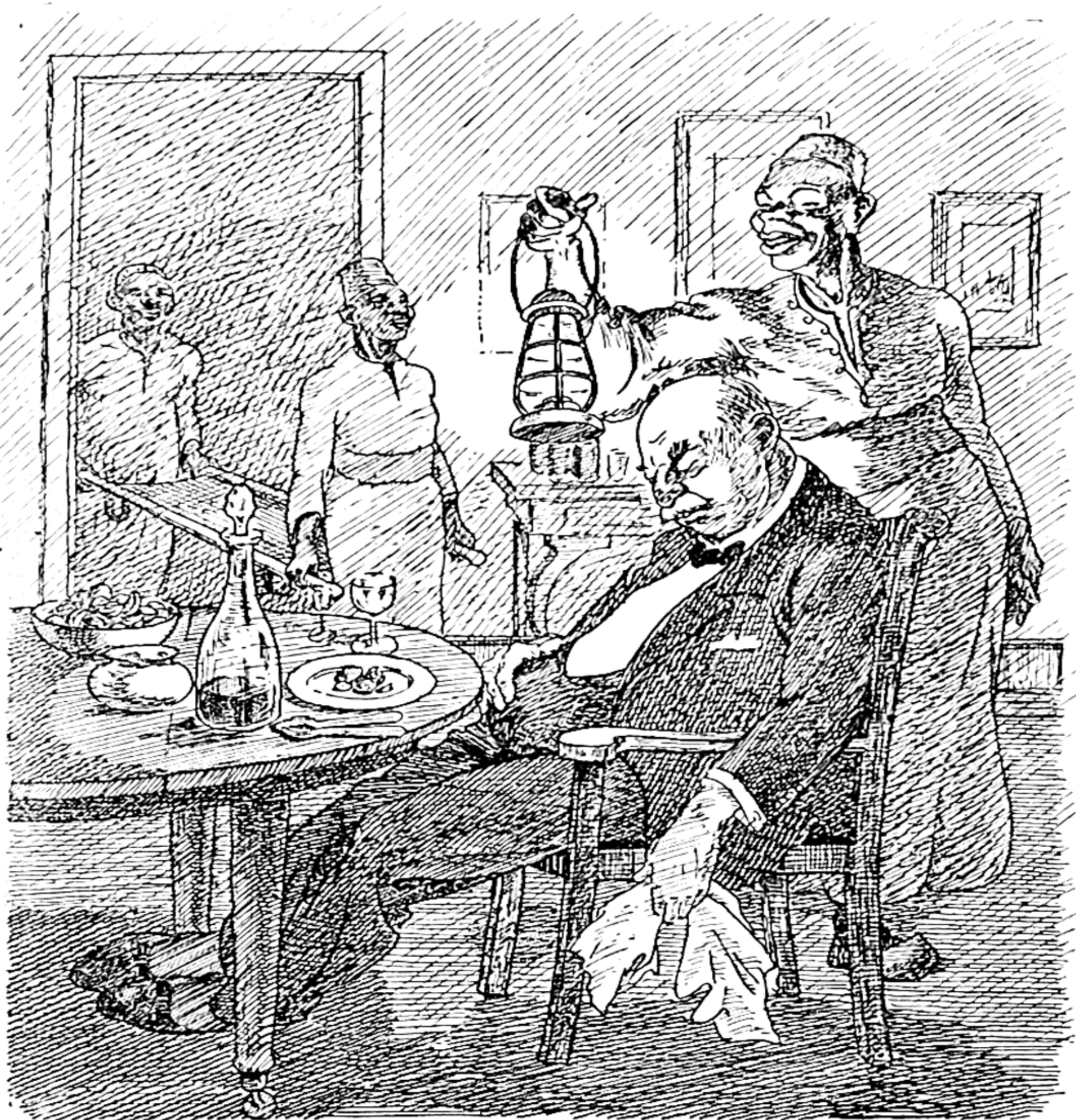
On return to the house for lunch one learns that one's long-suffering wife has gone to bed with a 'headache', finding that the only possible means of avoiding the waves of black-robed femininity which have been surging round the verandah all the morning and overflowing into bedrooms and bathrooms. There is a very firm belief in the East that once the sympathy of the wife has been enlisted the battle is won—apparently the Egyptian is not such an omnipotent Pasha in his home as he would have us believe. There is a general conviction—largely fallacious—that in the Mohammedan world the husband is the hundred-per-cent. he-man and rules his

wife with a rod of iron. Actually the percentage of trouser-wearing wiv and crushed-worm husbands is about the same as that which pertains in England—rather high.

One of the commonest form of *Qarib* is a vague shadow, which one imagines one has seen flit into a dark corner by the door when one enters the kitchen suddenly. It is such a very nebulous shadow and fades so rapidly that it is only after several surprise visits that one decides definitely that one *has* seen something. Enquiries will then cause this phantom to take definite shape, and one will discover that it is the cook's cousin—a very solid person tipping the scale at about sixteen stone and incidentally out of employment. He is such a very massive creature that one can only marvel how he managed to appear so shadowy and indistinct for so long a period. He is, of course, feeding at one's expense, and is standing by till such time as the *safragi* may fail one owing to a bout of drunkenness, sudden illness, or some other untoward event, when the *Qarib*, clad in the snowiest of white *galabias* and the smartest of red belts, will take his place at the table and wait with such perfection and silent skill that one feels one's household will not be completely efficient until he has replaced the erring *safragi* permanently. Unfortunately, however, nearly always it transpires that this pitch of excellence is merely transient, and that actually he is a worthless and lazy scoundrel, which accounts for his being a *Qarib*.

Then one may tell one's orderly that a smart and intelligent boy of not more than fourteen is required to act as second gardener and carrier of messages, and that a suitable and sprightly youth who will be quick on his feet should be obtained at once. The following day one finds crawling about the garden an elderly and decrepit person with one eye and a stiff leg, and it appears that this is the only suitable 'boy' that can be found for the job. None of the other applicants filled the bill in any way, and the fact that the selected candidate happens to be the uncle of the orderly's wife is merely one of those queer coincidences which occur from time to time in the Orient.

One of the worst cases of *Qarib* planting was the man who ran

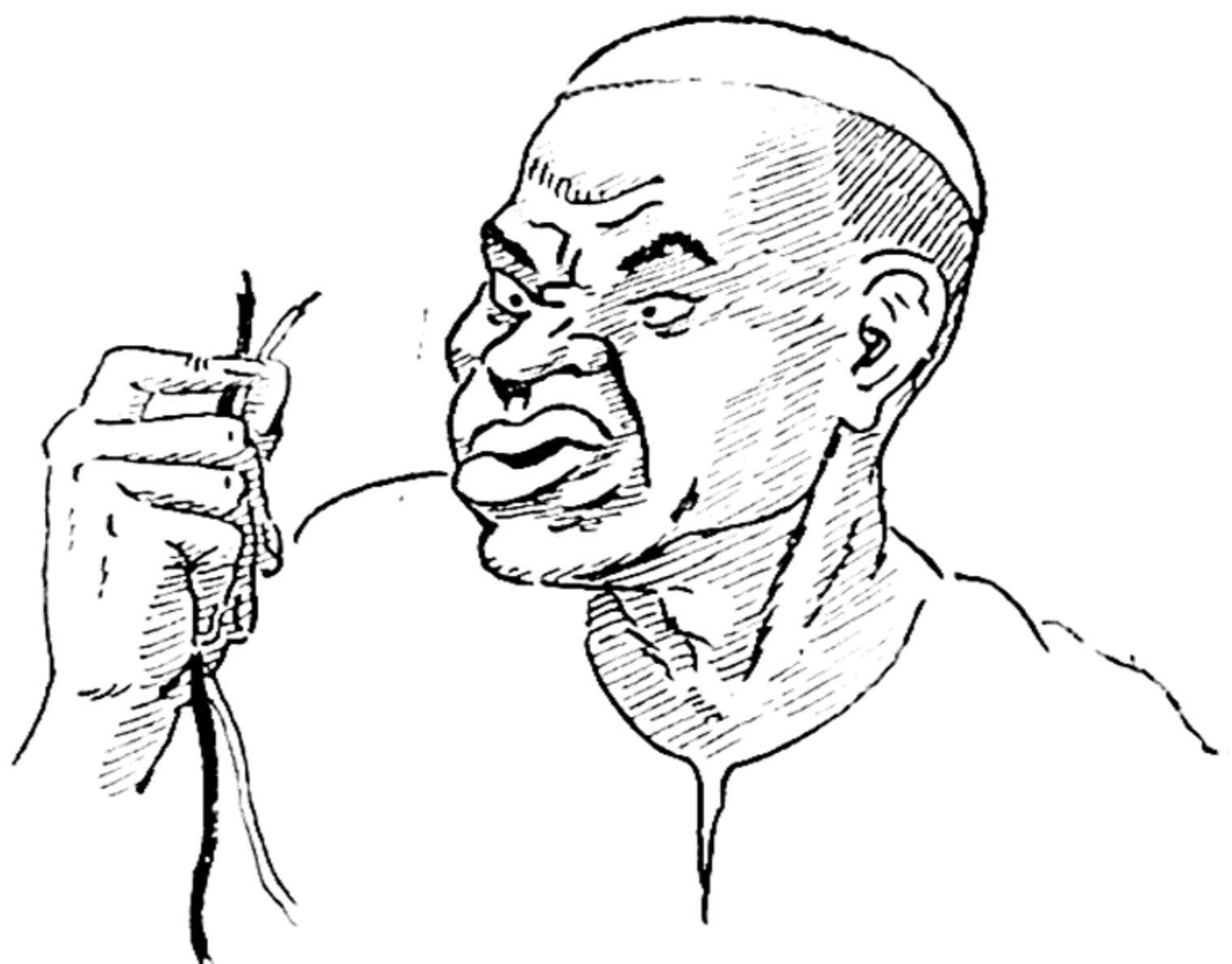


*An Indian Army Colonel who did himself so well
with port at dinner.*

my private electric-light plant at El Arish. It was a small three-horse power plant with a number of storage batteries, and was installed to run a Frigidaire and the house lighting. The peculiarity about these small electric plants is the storage battery, as the Company, when they sell the set to you, will inform you without batting an eyelid that the cells will last for seven years 'with care'. 'With care' is a very useful proviso, for when the cells peter out, as they do invariably after a year or eighteen months' service, the obvious retort is that proper care has not been observed, and as it is impossible to call reliable and competent witnesses to prove that you have sat up holding the pulse of the set for 365 nights a year the salesman will get away with it every time and sell you a fresh set of plates at £50.

I have known all sorts and conditions of competent and efficient men who have endeavoured to run these private plants; retired engineer admirals trained to work 18-inch guns by electric power, civil engineers who have spent their lives erecting 20,000-volt sets for the lighting of cities, and managers of big companies who have harnessed rivers to supply power, and they have one and all failed to do any good with this kind of set. I have met only one man who made his seven years' guaranteed 'with care' battery last more than three, and this happened to be an Indian Army colonel who did himself so well with port at dinner that he fell asleep at 9 p.m. sharp, and never noticed if there was any light in the house after this hour or not.

When my own set was purchased I told the Government electrician to select a smart youth capable of understanding the mysteries of volts and ampères—things I have never been able to understand myself—and teach him to run the engine. I then went on leave to England for three months, and on my return found the selected man installed and at work. I thought when I first saw him that he had a most vacant face and loose, silly mouth, and discovered, when the batteries disintegrated completely after six months' work, that he could only distinguish between red positive wires and black negative on those days when he was really concentrating. It did not come naturally to him to concentrate—that is to say he had to get up early in the morning, pull himself together, and do some Swedish exercises



He could only distinguish between red positive wires and black negative on those days when he was really concentrating.

and really heavy thinking before he realised he was a mechanic at all—and any little thing put him off. Whenever one of his children was ill, for instance, he charged up the set positive to minus and minus to positive, and forgot to put oil in the engine. Unfortunately he had a very large family, and they were all very unhealthy. Needless to say he was a *Qarib*—a very close *Qarib* of the Government mechanic and a recognised village idiot into the bargain. This particular *Qarib* cost me a matter of £120 before I rid myself of him.

One of the jobs that the Egyptian Government consider of very minor importance is that of *Farrash* to a rest-house. *Farrash*, when translated literally, means bedmaker, and he is the man who keeps the rest-house clean, makes the beds and generally takes charge of things. If the *Farrash* does his work properly, it is a fairly responsible post; and if the rest-house in question is used frequently, it is one that calls for a certain amount of work. A *Farrash*, if he is to be of any value, should be a superannuated cook or *safragi*, as in that case he will know enough about civilised houses not to use the sheets

as table-cloths and the table-cloths for sheets, but for many years now the post of *Farrash* has been filled almost exclusively by *Qaribs*—and the most hopeless type of *Qarib* at that.

In my early days in Sinai, before the peninsula was invaded by swarms of desert motorists, the post of *Farrash* at the outlying rest-houses did not attract the best type of applicant. The life was too dull and featureless to appeal to any but those who had lost all possible hope of obtaining employment elsewhere, and the rest-houses in consequence suffered from the shortcomings of those misfits who used carving-knives as wood-choppers, kept the paraffin in the kettle, and slept in all the beds in turn to obviate the necessity for airing.

One day I called in at a desert rest-house and found its condition indescribable—the dirt was beyond belief, the knives were red with rust, the cooking-pots caked with the remains of age-old meals, and a Saluki bitch was suckling a litter of pups on one of the beds. My servants rushed around trying to evolve order out of chaos, but my repeated shouts for the *Farrash* met with no response. Finally I sent for the N.C.O. in charge of the post and ordered him to produce the *Farrash* alive or dead and after a protracted search a wild, half-naked creature was produced. This, it appeared, was the *Farrash*, or rather the man who drew the £2 10s. 0d. a month for the post.

‘And who recommended this thing for the job of *Farrash*?’ I demanded. ‘It’s an idiot.’

‘I know, Effendim,’ said the N.C.O. ingenuously. ‘It’s my son, and he has no brain and is no good for anything. I recommended him for the post as I wish him to *akl aysh* (eat bread) at the Government expense. He is no good for any work, but *I* can’t keep him always. The Government must do that.’

Whilst on the topic of *Farrashes* I recall a rather amusing and typical episode which occurred in Sinai in connection with Kuntilla rest-house. Kuntilla, which lies on the Palestine frontier about 140 miles south from El Arish, possesses a rest-house I did not use very frequently, but one year, shortly after I had returned from leave in England, I announced my intention of going to inspect this post.

I set off the following morning with two cars, and after travelling some ten miles noted a small column of dust in front also moving rapidly southwards. I asked my driver what car it was, but he had no idea apparently, and neither had the other driver, though the column of dust was caused by a motor-car which had obviously travelled from El Arish. Sixty miles out I stopped at the post at Kosseima for some twenty minutes and the car in front, which I had almost overhauled, obtained a good start, so that I did not sight it again until we were within a few miles of Kuntilla. I stepped on the accelerator to try and catch up with it, for I recognised it as a Government car, but the driver followed suit and we made what was practically a dead heat of it on arrival at Kuntilla rest-house—the mysterious car just beating me by a short head.

On entering the building, which had only just been opened up, I found a frantic and sweating *Farrash* rushing around, trying to arrive at some semblance of order and hurling sheets and blankets on to the beds. He was in the last stages of exhaustion and shaking with fear, so I asked him if by any chance he had been a passenger in the unaccountable car which had arrived a minute before me, and then my servants and drivers, realising that further secrecy was useless, came out with the truth of which they had been aware from the start. One of my junior Egyptian officers, while I had been on leave, had absorbed the *Farrash* of Kuntilla rest-house into his own household at El Arish as a servant, hoping that I should not visit the post until this most necessary domestic had been replaced. Unfortunately and most inconveniently I had decided to visit this place immediately on my return, and in a most ungentlemanly manner had not given due warning which the customs and habits of the East require, with the result that the unfortunate *Farrash* had had to be pushed off at dawn in a low horse-powered car in a frantic endeavour to arrive at his post before the Governor himself, driving a much more powerful car, put in an appearance.

There is a rest-house in Lower Egypt which in the past must have been a very delightful little place, but which is now in a state of complete disintegration through age, both as regards the structure,

which is falling down, and the furniture, which has fallen down and is merely lodged together by a *Farrash* who would be 'Plus 4' at jig-saw puzzles if he took up the pastime. When one walked into the living-room the banging of the door would cause two chairs to rattle to the floor in detached legs, spokes and arms; on opening the wardrobe the top would fall on one's head; whilst a testing of the bed for softness would result in its sinking by the head like a torpedoed cruiser. An optimistic estate agent might value the building and its contents at about £20, and the peculiarity about it that a far-seeing Government has equipped it with the most efficient fire-fighting plant I have ever seen. In a row on the wall of the verandah are six water-buckets, three fire-extinguishers, six firemen's axes, an expanding ladder (the house being one storey only), and a set of firemen's brass helmets. One felt almost inclined to start a fire merely to justify the provision of this marvellous outfit, but there was the awful feeling at the back of one's mind that probably there would be no one to operate the plant except the *Farrash*, who is older even than the building and quite as decrepit.

The mention of brass helmets reminds me of the story of a small town in Palestine that decided to equip itself with a modern fire-engine, complete with helmeted firemen. After much delay the engine and the uniforms arrived, but the most important part of the equipment in Oriental eyes—the big brass helmets—did not materialise owing to a clerical error in ordering the outfit. However, the men were enlisted, and training in working the engine proceeded. Some time later, when the men had been passed out as efficient and qualified, the helmets arrived, but alas! they were one and all too big for the heads of the trained men. This, however, did not defeat the Town Council: if the helmets did not fit the men, men must be found to fit the helmets. The old staff were at once dismissed, and the district was carefully combed out for men with specially large-sized heads who could wear the brass helmets in a smart and firemanly manner.

Another peculiarity about rest-houses is the fact that the local workman has never yet discovered that there is such a thing as a

right-hand lock for a right-hand door and a left-hand one for a left. In the ordinary house there are probably an equal number of each variety, and by the law of averages the workman ought to get a matter of fifty per cent. right, but actually this is never the case. They are invariably all upside down. Various persons trying to open them by ordinary means have imparted to each lock an individual peculiarity which can only be overcome by following out an intricate formula known to the *Farrash* and no one else. This consists of a variety of movements, such as a half-turn to the key, a kick on the lower right-hand panel of the door, followed by the other half-turn at the psychological moment; or a complete twist in the wrong direction, a pull inwards and sharp jerk upwards. It is incredible how many combinations the ordinary lock can provide when it has been fitted upside down and treated by unsuspecting people as if it were a normal lock. The extraordinary part about the whole business, however, is the consummate ease with which the *Farrash* can manipulate the lock and open the door after one has spent a frantic quarter-of-an-hour trying to get the key to budge.

The handles of such locks, in protest against the rough treatment they receive, become detached from the bolts to which they are normally fastened by a small screw, and when this happens the *Farrash* inserts always a large and sharp french nail, twisting up the sharp end to keep it in position. This is a most devilish contrivance, as the unwary person gripping the handle and giving it a turn receives a deep and painful gash across the knuckles of his forefinger. The *Farrash*, however, can handle these implements of torture with an immunity from wounds which suggests rather the skill of a snake-charmer.

In summing up this valuable contribution to the biology of the Nile Valley one may say that these two well-known types, the *Qarib* and the *Farrash*, are actually the same species, but that the *Qarib* is the larva or embryo, which eventually blossoms forth into the complete and mature specimen.

Chapter Six

Along the Libyan Shore

Our soldiers who have been marooned in the North African desert for some three years of war write home their impressions of the country, and the complaint made by all appears to be that there is no book which contains the information they are seeking as to the flora, fauna and feather to be seen along the coastal belt. Actually there are quite a number of books which touch on Libya, but none of them deals with the country exclusively, and so here is an attempt to impart some information which I have been able to collect, for 'we travel in the print of older wars': twenty-six years ago I was campaigning around the Mersa Matruh and Sollum area, and later on was an administrative officer on the coastal belt and in the oases for four years.

It is not only soldiers on the spot who require information on the life they see in the desert, but also their relations and friends at home who wish to envisage the conditions under which their men are living. Judging by the correspondents' reports, and war communiques, Libya has the most ghastly climate in the world, for when it is not blowing a sandstorm with a temperature of 115° , it is pouring with icy rain so that half the desert is under water. I do not know if war has a malign effect on weather or not—during the four years between 1914–18 it seemed to be phenomenally bad wherever one happened to be serving, from Flanders to Mesopotamia—and possibly heavy gunfire does cause rain clouds to burst when they might pass overhead, and certainly constant traffic does break up the slight crust which forms on sand, gravel and clay, so that every little breeze starts an unpleasant dust storm.

The climate of Libya differs in that inland it is in summer extremely hot and intensely dry, but on the coastal belt extending some fifteen to twenty miles inland the heat is tempered by a prevailing wind from the Mediterranean, so that the thermometer ranges between 82° and 89° only; but the atmosphere is most humid. Spring starts at the beginning of April in the form of what is called a *Kham-*

sin. Khamsin is Arabic for 'fifty', and the theory is that from the first hot southerly wind of the year with its accompanying sandstorm there are fifty days during which these conditions may occur. These southerly blows last usually for three days—occasionally six—and the temperature even on the coast may be as high as 112° for the strong wind comes out of the heart of the Sahara like a blast from a furnace—a hackneyed expression, I admit, but it is the only one that describes adequately a wind so burning that it will make the metal portions of a car in the shade too hot to be touched with one's bare hands.

Between these blows there may be a week, a fortnight, or even three weeks, of glorious spring weather pleasantly warm by day and cool at night, and then by the beginning of June the country settles down to normal summer conditions. A steady cool north-west wind gets up at 9 a.m. and blows all day until sunset. Every morning the blazing sun rises in a cloudless sky and travels round its track until it sinks into the sea to the north-east—sometimes with a manifestation of the 'green flash'.

At the end of September the approach of autumn is signalled by some floating clouds, and the prevailing wind rises later in the day. Occasionally it fails altogether and there is some return to the hot wind and sandstorm conditions of spring. Then comes the first rain in the form usually of a violent thunderstorm, and this may occur any time between the 15th September and the end of October. Rains follow usually on three consecutive days—everything goes by threes in Libya——, but in normal times there are always spells of glorious autumn weather in-between the rainy days when the sun warms, but does not burn, and the whole desert sprouts with life and greenery. An average of three wet spells may occur between the first rain and the end of December, but in January and the early part of February there are longer periods, and occasionally, as has occurred during recent operations, the desert has been a sea of mud for weeks at a stretch. Such conditions, which cause misery and discomfort to troops engaged in active operations, are rare in normal times, and are regarded by the Beduin as bumper years when their desert barley

yields heavily with fat grains in long well-filled ears. Troops operating in Libya may find it difficult to believe that constant heavy rains are the exception rather than the rule, and that between 1918 and 1938 there were only two winters when the barley of the Beduin was a complete success. As rain is the determining factor with barley there were therefore eighteen years during which the winter rainfall was insufficient to ensure good crops for a cereal which requires the minimum of moisture. From all accounts—if they can be believed—the weather since operations started in 1940 has been suited for the successful cultivation of bananas, rice and other crops which grow with their roots in water!

The high desert, that which lies some two hundred miles and more inland, may be termed waterless, and all its experiences are extremely rare and quite circumscribed cloud-bursts, so that any given area obtains rain perhaps once in forty or fifty years. The villages in the various oases—Kharga, Dakhla, Siwa, Baharia and Farafra—are all built on high ground so that they stand up above the surrounding desert. The explanation of this is that every half century or so there has been a torrential downpour lasting several hours, and the small houses, which are built of mud brick and are not protected in any way against the wet or damp, disintegrate into a pudding the consistency of tapioca and sit down flat on their non-existent foundations. The day after the storm the people make a further supply of mud bricks and build up their houses again on the ruins of the old—and this is the explanation of the citadel-like appearance of all the villages.

When exploring in the heart of the desert one comes across areas covered with dried grass and herbage—proof that it has had rain recently, and proof also of the fact that the whole of this extremely arid region is covered thickly with seed blown down from the north on the prevailing wind, and which requires only some moisture to sprout into vigorous life. There is a very nice point here for the expert horticulturist to decide, and that is how long in this dry desert air will a small seed retain its vitality. I offer no opinion on this preserve of the expert, but I have an idea that the date stone will

sprout several centuries after some passing Arab or camel has spat it out of his mouth after consuming the fruit. If any portion of this hopelessly barren desert should be watered heavily for a month or more owing to a variety of causes, such as a newly-constructed well, a more or less permanent camp with water tanks, or some other reason, the whole of the damp patch will sprout with tiny but vigorous date palms. The nomad population of Libya is very small, and the fact that almost every square foot of its sandy surface has concealed in it a date stone which will germinate suggests that the accumulation must have been dropped by passing Arabs during a thousand years or more, and that the date stone is practically imperishable.

On these areas in the high desert, where an obliging rainstorm has caused some grass to grow and the dry scrub branches to produce some green shoots, will be found the small Dorcas gazelle, and occasionally, particularly near the Moghara Depression, the rarer Loder. The Dorcas stands about 30 inches at the withers and the male carries a curved and fairly thick serrated horn of about 12 inches, while the female has a short sharp spike. The colouring is sandy buff on the back with white underside and a very marked white scut. The Loder is about six inches higher and slimmer, with colouring which approximates to off-white. The Addax, a heavy brown antelope the size of a larger donkey, was plentiful in the Libyan desert about a century ago, but the modern rifle has been too much for this slow-moving beast, and the last recorded specimen in Egyptian Libya was shot by our car patrols south of Sollum during the last war. It is said that prior to the Italian occupation herds of them still existed in the vicinity of Jalo oasis and around Kufra, and they are known to be in some number in that part of the Sahara which borders on Darfur and Tibesti. Other fauna of Libya are the cheetah, the striped hyaena, the lynx or caracol, wild cat, the deeb, or wolf, the jackal, the desert fox, the fennec fox, and the jerboa rat in varying sizes. In writing about these animals I must explain that I am not a zoologist any more than I am an ornithologist, horticulturist or, in fact, any sort of 'ist'.

There was a letter in a journal from a Libyan warrior stating that

one of the men in his unit had shot a leopard. I think he must have been mistaken, for I know of no record of the leopard west of the Nile, but have seen cheetah on several occasions. The hyaena is rarely met with in the desert proper, and may be regarded as a hanger-on in the outskirts of the oases, the Nile Valley or any populated area. The same remarks apply to the wolf, but it must be borne in mind that the wolf of Egypt, though a distinct species, is a very small relation of the timber wolf of Canada. He is little larger than a big jackal, but can be distinguished from this animal by his moderately bushy tail.

The jackal is too well-known to require description—a mean, furtive cross between a dog and a fox with a miserable scrubby tail. Like the wolf and hyaena he has not much use for the open desert, but prefers the vicinity of the haunts of man. The lynx is extremely rare—I saw only two during my time in Libya—but he is a true lynx, with tufted ears and an extremely nasty expression on his face. The wild cat, like most desert creatures, is on the small side, only a little larger than an ordinary well-fed domestic Tom. He is a dull greyish brown in colour, with black rings on his tail.

The desert fox is about the same size as a British fox, but the rich bracken red is absent and the colouring is rather more grey than red. The fennec is seldom met with in the northern parts of Libya, and is usually to be found on the edge of the oases. He is considerably smaller than the desert fox, being built on the most delicate lines and equipped with enormous ears. The first fennec I saw was standing on the top of a giant sand dune outside Dakhla Oasis with the setting sun behind him. The general lighting effect increased his size in an extraordinary fashion, and caused his extremely large ears to assume enormous proportions, so that I imagined I was looking at some strange beast unknown to zoology. It was not until the fennec scurried away over the crest of the dune that, seeing him from another angle, I realised I had been looking at a miniature fox, and not an animal the size of a water buffalo.

As another instance of the unreliability of eye witnesses with regard to fauna of the desert I recall an occasion when I was out with

a Light Car Patrol south of Mersa Matruh during the last war. In the front car with me was Major Williams, M.C., who afterwards wrote a War Office handbook on Libya, and in the car just behind was a Captain Lindsay. We had, all of us, been in the Libyan Desert for some time and all three of us had a fairly good knowledge of big game and wild beasts generally. We came up in the cars from a deep wadi on to a small plateau on which there was a Beduin graveyard, consisting of large boulders erected as head and foot stones. In the midst of these a large animal got up and went off at a lumbering gallop. We stopped the cars and took several shots at it, but missed, and when discussing the matter later it transpired we had all seen it as a totally different beast!

Lindsay was quite firm that it was a cheetah, as he had seen its spots and its very long waving tail. I had seen it as a striped hyaena, and was positive that the only tail it possessed was the miserable little stump with which the hyaena tribe is equipped. Williams said emphatically that we were both utterly wrong, as it was an ordinary, very common or garden, jackal. We argued about the matter that night over the camp fire until Venus in pursuit of the waning moon had passed the zenith, but nothing would shake our personal convictions—and I am still certain it was a hyaena. Yet those other eye-witnesses were quite as well informed about wild animals as I am, and had quite as efficient eye-sight.

The mention of Venus and the waning moon reminds me of a cold dawn in the desert on patrol when we were breaking camp, or rather bivouac, at 3 a.m. for the day's trek. It was still pitch dark, and as is usual in that clear, rarefied air of the desert, the stars were very bright indeed, and away to east near the horizon I saw in the sky for the first time the national emblem of Turkey and Egypt—the star and the crescent. Venus as a brilliant planet was shining apparently inside the last quarter; or, to be more exact, the thin clean-cut sickle of the waning moon, and I realised then that the star and crescent device, which afterwards I wore on my military buttons for some eighteen years, was not an imagining of mere man, but an actual astral manifestation at certain periods of the year.

When I come to the jerboa I must admit that my ignorance of zoology becomes apparent, as I am not sure how many varieties of desert rats there are which affect the little jerboa tuft to their tails. I have an impression they are in three sizes like the Italian flour product, macaroni, spaghetti and vermicelli, as I have seen specimens nearly as large as our British brown rat, and others much the same size as a field mouse. They are general all over the desert, but are most commonly met with on the caravan tracks, or *darbs*, as like the sand grouse their main food consists of the grains of barley to be found in camel droppings. They are normally nocturnal in their habits, and one obtains some idea of their numbers if one drives along a camel track at night with the head lamps on, as every minute one sees in the column of light a small dancing object in fawn and white looking like a little creature from fairyland. During the last war, when we were camped in front of Gaza for five long weary months, we had a tame jerboa which used to come in from under the fly of the mess-tent for every meal, and who ultimately became so tame that he used to hop round the chairs dodging the waiters' feet and accepting tit-bits from the diners. He must have been a very hungry little jerboa when our camp was struck with the fall of Gaza and we moved on some sixty miles, but perhaps he attached himself to a Line of Communications unit.

I was once on an exploring expedition in search of the now non-existent and mythical oasis of Zarzura, and when we were some two hundred miles west of Dakhla, in the very heart of waterless and particularly ghastly desert, we found one morning around our bivouac the tracks of many jerboas, and also those of a desert fox. They convinced us that we must be in the vicinity of the lost oasis and water, and for the next two days we patrolled in every direction in search of it, but in vain. There was neither oasis nor water within two hundred miles of the spot, which is proof that the desert fox can go without water for an incredible time, and that the jerboa, though he may get a drop of dew occasionally, can exist on nothing more substantial than the tiny seeds of plants. The spot in question had obtained a heavy fall of rain some years



The most noticeable thing about this barren coast is the small shore crab, which is here, there and everywhere.

previously, as there were tufts of yellow dry grass and other growths in the area.

The Beduin Arab eats the jerboa, and he has a particularly cruel method of obtaining them. Having caught one alive, he breaks a leg and lets it hop across the desert in front of him. There are jerboa holes at the foot of every patch of scrub, with which the desert is covered, but only a small proportion of these are tenanted. Apparently the jerboa will not enter a hole unless it is occupied, and so the unfortunate little 'stalking horse' goes hopping across the desert, sniffing at every hole, and when he enters one the Beduin quickly digs him out, together with his unfortunate host, and then moves on again to repeat the operation.

The actual coast of Libya, where a very blue Mediterranean rolls up on a golden sandy shore, is singularly deserted, for bird life here is confined to an occasional sandpiper and his mate, sometimes the blue rock pigeon, if there are small rocky cliffs by the sea, and, in the migrating season in the autumn, the quail on his journey to the centre of Africa. The most noticeable thing about this barren coast is the small shore crab, which is here, there and everywhere, more particularly just before dusk. He is quite at home in the water, but prefers the land, and when chased will usually make for one of the many holes in the sand. They are the scavengers of the shore, and at sunset, with the evening light behind them, create a weird effect as they move in large parties along the strip of glistening wet sand by the breaking wavelets, with their semi-transparent claws waving above their bodies. A large gathering of them in any spot means carrion, sometimes the body of a large fish, sometimes a sea-gull, and—in these days of torpedoed Italian troopships—possibly something grimmer.

The bird life of Libya is variegated and numerous. This seems to have puzzled our troops, who had expected to find a desert where no life in any form existed. Moreover they have seen birds which they recognized as British varieties, as well as others which they did not recognize. The fact is that they were stationed in a place where one has perhaps a better opportunity of studying ornithology than any-

where in the world, for it is on the main route of the migrating hosts which move southwards from Europe every autumn, and in the spring, to quote from an old drawing-room ballad of Victorian days, 'the birds go north again'.

To deal with the bird life properly is out of the question in one short chapter—in fact unless a bird-book consists of at least four volumes, and is extremely well illustrated it is always inadequate. The best one can do is to mention a few of those varieties which are most obvious. Among the migrating hosts which may or may not alight on any given spot are all the duck family of the British Isles, all the falcons, hawks and harriers, a variety of eagles, quite seventy per cent. of the small birds we know at home, together with storks, cranes and owls which hail from Central Europe, and several other varieties which perform a local migration such as the brilliant blue roller, the three bee-eaters and the golden orioles.

Of the birds of prey those which are possibly most common are the peregrine falcon, a larger relation called the sakr, and the two French grey harriers—the hen and the pallid. Both of these are very obvious in the spring, when the returning quail spend a short time in the barley crops of the nomad Beduin before attempting the cross-Mediterranean flight to Europe, and one sees these harriers cruising just above the ears of corn on the look-out for weary migrants below.

Perhaps the most obvious of all the visiting birds are the wagtails, and, as at home we connect the bird with water meadows and mountain burns, it is a surprising and almost pathetic sight to see them walking about on the sand of an arid desert. Two of our British wagtails migrate through Libya—the grey and the yellow—and there are also several others of the family which hail from Europe, such as the blue-headed, black-headed and white wagtail. Seemingly they connect humans with the amenities of life, for wherever a column may halt in Libya during the spring or autumn, sooner or later a wagtail, possibly two or three, will appear and will appreciate a saucer of water or any scraps that may be thrown to him.

Among the other British birds who migrate through Libya are the redstart, black redstart, red-backed shrike, grey shrike, robin,

chaffinch, greenfinch, willow wren, chiff-chaff, nightingale, and blackbird; but this list is by no means complete. Some of these birds may be seen on the outward autumn migration and others on the return in the spring, while a few may be in evidence on both journeys; but the general rule with migrants is that the routes taken for the southerly journey do not coincide with those of the northerly.

The indigenous birds of the Libyan Desert are of all varieties, and far more numerous than one might imagine, but there are two species which our patrols are always seeing, and which judging from letters written by very amateur ornithologists are puzzling everybody. One of these is the cream-coloured courser, a buff and white bird of the plover family, and the other is the bifasciated lark, also buff and white, but with some black and dark brown pencilling on the wings. Both these birds are fairly common where the roughly cultivated areas of the coastal belt end and meet the real harsh desert, and our patrols see them running in front of the cars. The bifasciated lark is not very much like a lark, and the courser not very much like a plover, so it is a little confusing and, as the colouring of both is much the same, when it is a matter of writing a description, it may be difficult to discriminate between them. The bifasciated lark has rather long stilt-like legs and a slightly curved beak, but in the spring he tries to be a real lark who sings at Heaven's gate. His 'ceiling', however, is only about ten feet, and on reaching this meagre height he comes swooping downwards on a long drawn note.

The other larks of the desert are the extremely common crested lark and the retiring sandlark. The two varieties are very similar, except that the latter has no crest. In the migrating season also will be seen enormous flocks of the short-toed lark, which is very similar to our skylark.

Then there are the desert chats, wheatear and the mourning chat in deep black and pure white. This is a most engaging and friendly little bird, and with a little encouragement will play the part of the dining-table robin, and with better table manners, one might say, as unlike our robin he does not drop a green and white visiting card every two minutes.

The only partridge in Egyptian Libya is the Barbary variety, which is similar to the chikor, but rather smaller. The Senegal sand grouse will be seen in flocks on any track used by camel and animal traffic, and farther to the west in Cyrenaica a larger variety, the pin-tailed, and also the coroneted, which is distinguishable from the common or Senegal variety by the black pencilling round the eyes. The Arab name for the sand grouse is *qatta*, derived from the high-pitched chuckling note a flock of these birds make when on the wing, but the Arab does not differentiate between the various species: to him all sand grouse are the same.

Among the many migrants which, though European, are not usual in the British Isles are the quail, which arrive in Libya from the north in September and October, and on their passage after resting for one night on the coast continue their flight to Central Africa the next day. On their return journey in March they linger for some time in the barley crops of the Beduin, and the migration is not nearly so marked as is the outward one in the autumn. A very striking bird which every Indian Army soldier will recognise is the blue roller, a relation of the jay, which in some lights looks cobalt blue and in others that particular shade of blue shot with iridescent green which our kingfisher affects. Then there are great spotted cuckoo, which is larger than the common cuckoo and which wears a crest like a lap-wing's; the golden oriole, a bird slightly bigger than a blackbird, which as its name suggests is golden yellow in colour, with dull black wings; and here, there and everywhere the hoopoe, though most of them are of the Egyptian variety with the short beak, and not of the rare type, which exists in the British Isles in certain localities every year, and which has a long curved beak.

The hoopoe is one of the few species the Beduin recognises as a distinct species. To them, unless a bird has a food value, or some very marked feature, it is considered not worth worrying about, and the warblers, redstarts, chats, wheatears, as well as sparrows, are grouped together as *asfur* (small birds), a system which on the whole saves a lot of trouble. The hoopoe, however, according to an Arab legend, was appointed by Suliman (Solomon of the Old Testament) as king

of all the birds, and promptly donned a crown. Shortly after his coronation he failed in his duties in some fashion and was deposed, but nevertheless retained the right to continue to wear his crown. The famous wisdom of Solomon was sorely at fault if he promoted to royalty a bird who spends the whole of his time on refuse dumps and dunghills, for the hoopoe, despite his very patrician appearance, is possibly one of the foulest feeders in the whole ornithological world.

Among the reptiles of Libya there are a variety of small lizards, including the ugly gink, with a head shaped like a broad-arrow, and the big monitor, or *warran*, which grows as large as a dachshund dog. The further south one goes the bigger the *warran* gets and, though on the coastal belt the average size is about two feet without the tail, I have seen them on the outskirts of Dakhla Oasis some 400 miles south at least twice this size, and resembling young crocodiles or iguanas. The monitor can bite hard, if one is foolish enough to give him a chance, but his normal defence is a lashing stroke from his long tail, and a very accurate and powerful stroke it is too. In my desert days I had a Scottie terrier who would cheerfully tackle a wild cat or jackal, but who drew the line at monitor lizards. During his first and only encounter with one he received half a dozen lashes from a very energetic and powerful tail, which felt so much like cuts from a dog whip that he put the monitor off his hunting list as a creature which did not fight fairly.

The commonest snake of the desert is the little horned viper—a most unpleasant reptile, as he is fitted with two poisonous spikes on the top of his head, in addition to the ordinary equipment of fangs. The bite of one of these vipers is often fatal unless immediate steps are taken to counteract the poison. The horned viper is particularly dangerous, because he is sluggish in his movements and cannot get out of the way quickly, and is nocturnal and inquisitive in his habits, so that there is a risk of coming in contact with him when rolling into one's valise at night, or while sitting round the camp fire. The peculiarity about this small viper is that he does not move forward in swerves, as do all the other snakes, but edges along sideways by tightening up his coils and moving them laterally.

On the cultivated gardens by the Libyan coast the cobra is to be found rarely, but I shot one at Ikingi Mariut, near Alexandria, in a disused Roman quarry. I had been losing pigeons regularly from the pigeon loft and suspected a wild cat, until one day I saw the tracks of a large snake leading away from the birds' quarters. I followed these up and found that they led to the old quarry where beneath a large overhanging rock I saw on a patch of sand the outlines of his body when he used the spot for basking. I walked up there at midday with my gun, and saw my pigeon-eating visitor lying in a neat coil with ~~his~~ evil, diamond-shaped head placed on top. I put a charge of No. 5's into him at ten yards' range, and as the shots hit him, he rose to what appeared to be quite half his length—six feet—and struck furiously in my direction. Then he collapsed into writhing coils in his death throes, but the remarkable part about it was how he managed to rise and strike at all, seeing that his back was broken in at least six places. This was a particularly large specimen, but there are of course far more cobras in Cairo city itself than there are in the wilds of the Libyan Desert. There was one which lived on the stairs leading to the field officers' quarters in Kasr-el-Nil barracks, and which I met frequently late at night when returning to my room after dinner in the mess, but on the presence of this reptile I dared not comment, for obvious reasons.

Chapter Seven

'Musty—The Mechanical Mind'

When I started my service in Egypt after the last war, it coincided with a new order of things—the adoption of mechanical transport on the frontiers and the gradual elimination of the camel and pony. In this respect I may say that the elimination has been very gradual indeed, as when I retired six years ago there were still more than 250 police and gendarmerie mounted on camels in Sinai.

Mechanical transport is perhaps rather a grand and expansive word to use for the old model, two-gear Ford, which in those days was known throughout Egypt as the 'Tin Lizzie' or the 'Flying Bedstead'. A maddening car in many ways, but a very redoubtable one, for I still see odd specimens in the back blocks of Dorset and Wiltshire, carrying on despite the burden of twenty years or more.

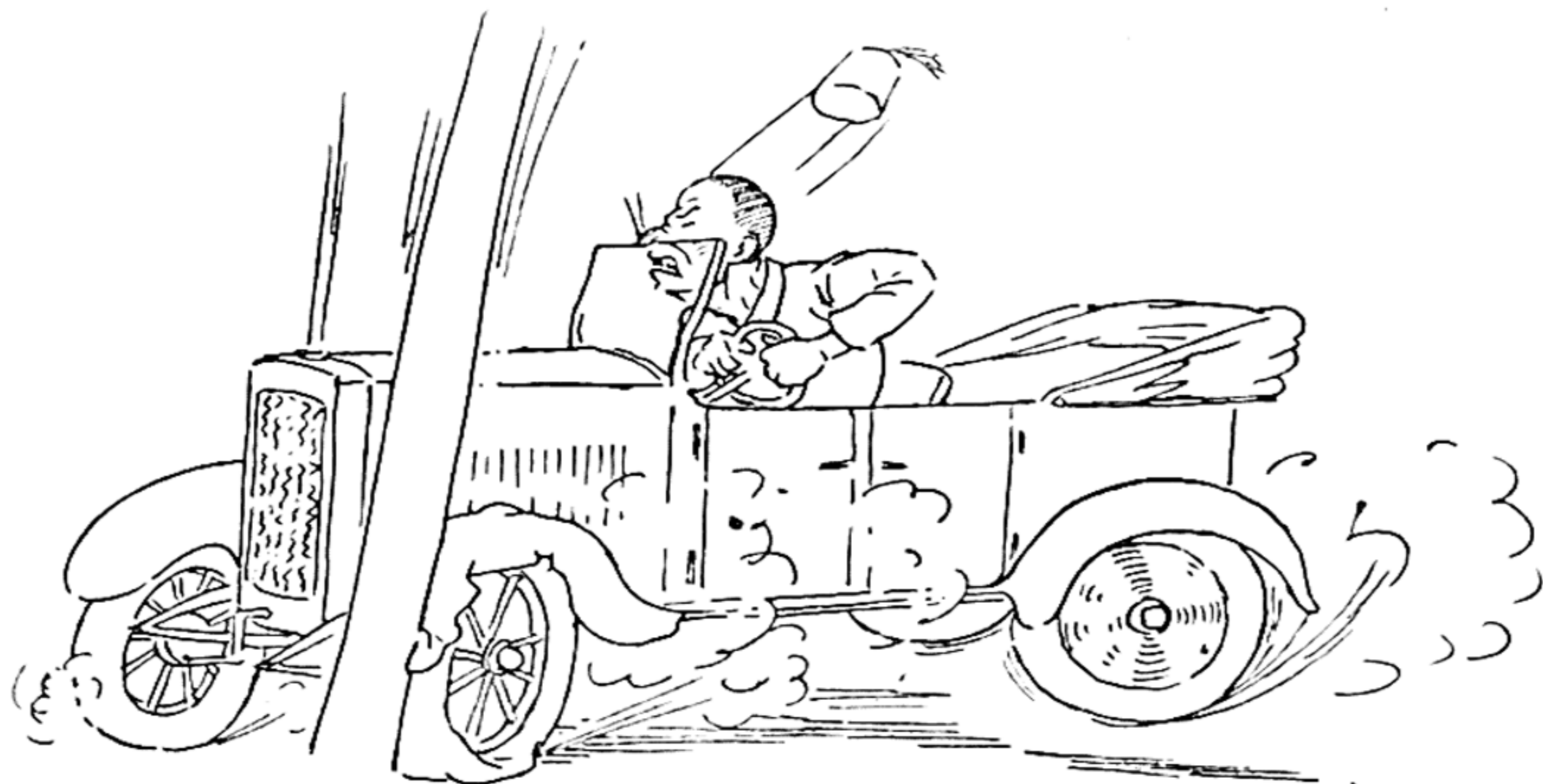
The Egyptian Government has always been remarkable for the strict economy it exercises over desert administration, the argument being that a man who is fool enough to put up with the desert will put up with anything. For this reason in 1919 we did not get new cars for our service, but second-hand ones from the bargain basement of the Army Disposal Board which had already seen three hard years of war service. They had therefore been very thoroughly 'run in'.

In Sinai I had sixteen drivers and mechanics, and of these fifteen were excellent men in every way. The sixteenth was the exception. He was a legacy—or perhaps it would be more exact to describe him as a discard from weakness. This meant that he was a migrant, for he never stayed in one province for more than six months. I had him first when I was acting as Governor in Luxor, and he brought the car on the morning of my arrival to the Winter Palace Hotel, where I was staying. I started to drive away from the hotel down the street, when the car, without any movement on my part, turned sharp left and ran straight through a flower bed. At this point the accelerator jammed, and for the next minute I zig-zagged about in front of the hotel,

narrowly missing the Nile and a shop window on two occasions. I also knocked down six or seven men, but as they were hawkers of fly-whisks and sham antiques this constituted the day's good deed. When I did manage to get a hand free to switch off the ignition I descended and found the front axle bent in a U. The driver explained that he had only hit a telegraph pole on the way to the hotel, but that the car was quite all right, as he could drive it. He could! And that is what turned me against him, for if a man could drive a car in that condition it was proof that he had as big a kink in his mind as had the front axle.

He left me after this, was shuffled through the pack, went to other provinces, and was finally dealt out to me again many years later in Sinai. I thought I knew his face, but he affirmed tactfully that we had never met before in any desert. I remembered him and his kinked axle, however, when one day on patrol I saw him drive his car bang into the sheer wall of a jutting cliff. After this he left me for the second and last time, and I never saw his face again.

He was, as I have said, an exception, for all the others were not only first-class drivers and mechanics, but they had the most fertile and ingenious brains for arriving at devices for bringing a derelict car



He had only hit a telegraph pole on the way to the hotel.

into port. This was due to the fact that they were not brought up in the tradition of a break-down car always available and an up-to-date workshop full of good mechanics ready to effect repairs. The car was their 'pigeon,' and they were responsible for it in every way. If they broke down in the desert they stayed out there until they had devised some makeshift which would make it move again, and that is a most wonderful incentive to invention.

One day, between Cairo and Suez, my car broke the rubber connection that joins the radiator to the engine. My driver, Mustafa, called 'Musty' for short, as he always looked frowzy and untidy, pulled a new one out of his tool-box, but when he went to fit it on it proved to be far too large.

'God send Stores to hell,' he muttered. 'The sons of dogs. It's a Morris part.'

In those days we had Morris six-wheelers as well as Fords, and so, of course, our Stores, like stores the world over, always sent Morris parts for Fords and Ford parts for the Morris.

This did not knock a feather out of Musty. As if he were performing a drill movement, he loosened his braces and pulled out the tail of his shirt from his breeches, ripped off a strip a yard long, unscrewed the hub of a wheel, hooked out a finger-load of grease, smeared it on the strip of flannel, wound it round the pipe from the engine, and then fitted the rubber tube over it neatly and screwed it up tight. It was all performed so rapidly that I realised it was a recognised method of counteracting Stores' carelessness. It cut both ways, of course, for sooner or later Stores had to deal with part-worn shirts which were tailless, and there must have been many of them. I cannot understand how it is I was never called upon to render a report in triplicate as to the reason why the drivers of Sinai had no tails to their shirts. I feel it is a subject on which I might have written some epic prose, and the request, coming from the Egyptian Government, would not have been unreasonable, seeing that the British Government in 1922 asked me what I had done with a portable telephone and set of entrenching tools I had signed for in Ploegstreet in November 1914. As I am only an autobiographist and not a fiction

writer I was unable to be of any assistance to them. I did feel, however, that in the man who wrote the letter I had met the world's most incurable optimist.

It was Musty who invented the 'Broken Frame Rapid Repair Outfit', and he should have been famous, but unfortunately this wonderful invention was never put on the market properly. The frame of the old model we were then using was not its strongest member, and after a hard, bumpy run over rough desert a fracture was a common occurrence. This happened usually at the spot where a bracket supporting the engine was bolted on to the frame. Musty's invention consisted of a small block of wood that fitted neatly into the U of the frame and was then bound with telegraph wire, the wire being tightened up by a tyre lever used as a tourniquet and lashed in position. This was the Mark I Model of the invention, and I ran frequently for upwards of 200 miles with a frame repaired in this fashion. The improved model, Mark II, which came out a year later, consisted of the same block of wood, but instead of the telegraph-wire lashing he evolved two clips with screws which held the block in position and clamped the fracture together. This was so efficient that one did not always take the trouble to replace the broken frame when a new one was available.

Space does not permit of a description of all Musty's inventions during the fourteen years I served with him. Date stuffing for radiator leaks or for oil sumps, which was one of his fruitful ideas, has now become general all over Arabia, where the date in its stickiest and most glutinous form is a recognized diet, but because Musty did not take out a patent he obtained no financial benefit from an invention that is at least as good as the proprietary preparations that are sold on the British market to-day.

Musty began to take an interest in aeroplanes somewhere about 1925, when a machine crashed at Nekhl, in Central Sinai, and as this was a most inaccessible spot eighteen years ago, the Royal Air Force did nothing more about it but left it there to rot. Musty loved that aeroplane. Every time we visited Nekhl he went down to the crashed machine with a spanner and a screw-driver and gnawed bits off it in

the same way that a hyena gets the tasty cuts off a dead camel. There were so many pieces of that defunct aeroplane on my car at the end of two years that I was afraid to travel too fast in it for fear of taking off.

It must not be thought that Musty was a haphazard workman with a bent for queer makeshifts. He was actually a born mechanic with a real mechanical mind, and his makeshifts were due solely to his natural ability being stifled and thwarted by a job which was not worthy of his calibre, and a Stores Department that starved him.

His great day came at last. One morning a Royal Air Force machine made a forced landing at El Arish in the wadi in front of the Government buildings. There was nothing very remarkable about this, as such landings were not infrequent, for El Arish lies on the main route between Egypt and Palestine. In the 'plane were two very peevish and extremely senior officers. They were both so very senior, indeed, that I do not think they should have been allowed to pilot a machine themselves; they ought to have had someone quite junior with them to look after them—a Flying Officer, or at any rate a Flight Lieutenant. In all my experience of the Royal Air Force I have never seen two officers of such exalted rank in one aeroplane with no proper pilot available.

The officers got out and surveyed El Arish and its surrounding desert with a gloomy and depressed air. I understood that feeling, as I experienced it myself when I arrived there first seventeen years previously, but one gets over most things in seventeen years. Then they had a look at the machine and stated that they were scuppered. I cannot remember now what was wrong with it, but one of the vital services had failed to function—the oil had ceased to flow or the carburettor to carburette—and there was nothing for it, they said, but to telephone for a 'plane and mechanic.

At this moment Musty and his *wakil* came up. A *wakil* is a handyman who helps the craftsman, and who often knows nearly as much as the craftsman himself. I may say that neither of them was looking his best on this occasion. Musty never aspired to a Saville Row standard even when we went to functions in Cairo, and in his work-



'Can my two mechanics try to put the machine right for you?'

shop he wore things that were definitely in the negligée class, and his *wakil* was even worse. The *wakil* was wearing a grey beard and a green turban to show that he had visited Mecca, and Musty was in oily dungarees and a red tarbush with a big dent in it. The effect of these two awful apparitions on the senior officers was lamentable. They turned their heads away in pain and hopeless despair, and looked at the desert, which was preferable apparently. They did not know, as I did, that many a bright mechanical brain works beneath a dirty turban or dented tarbush.

‘Can my two mechanics try to put the machine right for you?’ I asked, indicating Musty and his henchman.

This tactless remark caused such consternation and supreme contempt that I changed the topic hastily and suggested lunch instead; and so we went up to lunch and cocktails. One does not connect iced cocktails with the heart of a waterless desert, but we used to shake quite a good one in El Arish, as we had a Frigidaire and grew a very special lime that put just the right citrus tang into a dry Martini.

After the second cocktail the atmosphere cleared considerably and visibility improved to such an extent that the officers were able to see the bright side of things.

‘We might with luck get away at six this evening if we telephone Ismailia at once,’ they said.

I rang the bell and when my staff officer came in I told him to get through to the Air Force, Ismailia, and ask for an aeroplane to come and fetch two officers and to bring a mechanic for repairs.

‘There will be no need for one, Effendim,’ he said. ‘Mustafa has repaired the one in the wadi. He has just sent up now to say that it is all right.’

‘What! Repaired it—that scarecrow? Impossible!’ said the two officers.

‘No, Effendim, not impossible. He has done it and has started the engine up. Listen, you can hear it.’

The officers grabbed their caps and made for the door. ‘For God’s sake hurry, or the blighter will take off in it!’

Chapter Eight

Routine, Red Tape and Returns

As I was a Government official myself for some eighteen years I feel I am in a position to throw stones at myself and the class to which I belonged, and the thing that puzzled me before I was a Government official, while I was a Government official, and after I was a Government official, is why more unmitigated idiocy emanates from Government offices in twelve months than from any big business firm in twenty years. A possible explanation is that, if a business firm made even five per cent. of the blunders the average Government department makes it would become insolvent and close down, whereas no such penalty is attached to a Government office. Moreover, a managing director sacked for incompetence goes into oblivion, while an incompetent head of department in the Government, when relieved of his post, is promoted to another appointment, or goes to the House of Peers.

Years ago, when I was in harness, I used to ask myself why I wrote such stupid letters. All I could say in reply was that they were typed for me by an expert Government clerk who knew what he was doing, and they were fitting answers to very stupid questions. It is not the slightest bit of use to attempt to change the *métier* and switch nonsense into reason, and to give a common-sense reply to an idiotic query is merely to add to the confusion. So keep it silly and all is well, and as a reward one goes into the Birthday Honours List.

A marked feature of this war is the way in which new recruits to the Government service have acquired all the special knowledge, and, shall we say, *esprit de corps* of trained civil servants, and many of them have been authors



... or goes to the House of Peers.

of fatuities and masterpieces of the obvious which might have been created by tried and senior veterans.

There was that war time official who gave the order for onions to stand fast in the damp autumn of 1941, and refused to allow them to disperse in the normal way. They remained in their places of assembly pending further orders, while the O.C. Onions tried to remember the next word of command, and when finally instructions to disperse arrived more than fifty per cent. of the onions had rotted or grown foot-long green whiskers. Precisely the same thing occurred with eggs, but the official delay here was even more disastrous, for though there are such things as James's Long-Keeping onions and other varieties, which to quote from the seedsmen's catalogues, 'keep till onions come again,' there is nothing of the sort in the egg world unfortunately: every hen lays much the same sort of shelled product, the contents of which are always perishable.

Apparently the O.C. Eggs gave instructions for all the eggs in the country to be stored in various convenient centres, and having done this he waited for the next move. Years ago there used to be certain judges who tried very human cases in the Law Courts and who prided themselves on knowing nothing whatsoever of the ordinary world in which ordinary people lived. They were in the habit of asking innocent questions in Court such as 'What is the Derby?' or 'Who is Marie Lloyd?', and of course the reporting journalists swooped on these remarks with paeans of pure joy. Apparently the judges thought this newspaper publicity very good value, as in their opinion a complete ignorance of all mundane matters, which interested the common herd, constituted proof of a judicial mind and intelligence well above the average.

The O.C. Eggs was exactly like these judges of yesteryear, and he did not know that eggs would not keep for ever. When, therefore, the stored eggs began to burst like stink bombs in every store in the country, he went around looking for places in which to dump them. He poisoned one of the best rivers in Scotland just at the beginning of the run of the spring fish; he put a coal mine out of action by dropping several thousands of vintage eggs down a disused shaft

and creating something much more poisonous than the dreaded 'damp'; and, according to a report from Liverpool, one of our big convoys ran into an area sown with floating eggs, and broke up into confusion owing to the crews becoming asphyxiated by the stench from those broken by the bows of the ships and their propellers.

The most puzzling side of officialdom is that which is connected with economy. One might say that economy is its watchword: they have mottoes calling attention to it on the walls of their offices, they print slogans about it on the top of their notepaper, and heads of departments get quite lyrical and red in the face expounding the principle of it and the necessity for its observance in all things. Yet in all their actions there is nothing to suggest that officialdom understands the meaning of the word, for they write three separate letters when one would serve the purpose, they issue fresh sets of instructions which are merely repetitions of the first, with one or two split infinitives eliminated; and if one of the general public discloses the fact that he has been practising economy he is made to suffer for it immediately. The following is a little fairy story, based on truth, written for both grown-ups and children, which throws some light on their methods:—

Once upon a time there were two farmers owning about seventy acres each, both doing their best after twenty years of Government neglect, and each maintaining a small tractor for ploughing and other work. One farmer was a most conscientious and correctly-minded man with a great reverence for the majesty and super-intelligence of officialdom: we will call him the Good Farmer. The other was more like you and me, with the ordinary sceptical outlook towards life and its varied weaknesses, and we will therefore call him the Wicked Farmer.

One day the Good Farmer's tractor broke some important part of its internal economy, and two months elapsed before repairs could be effected. As during this period the tractor could not work the Good Farmer found himself with several coupons for petrol unexpended, but with a large amount of delayed ploughing to be done. He looked up the regulations concerning this state of affairs, and

discovered that he should send the unused coupons back to the local Petroleum Officer for cancellation. This he did, and with the coupons he sent a long letter explaining exactly how the situation had occurred.

A few weeks later the tractor of the Wicked Farmer broke the same part and his machine was out of action for two months. The Wicked Farmer read the instructions about unused petrol coupons, laughed cynically and, saying 'You won't have me for a mug', put them on the fire.

Now in fairy stories like this one should end up on a happy and correct note, proving the triumph of right over wrong, the reward of the Good Farmer and the discomfiture of the Wicked Farmer, but I find it difficult to do this. Ever since the Good Farmer returned his unused coupons he has been treated as an embryo malefactor, he has been visited by officials who make pertinent and impertinent enquiries, and he has never yet been able to obtain the same allowance of petrol as before; but the Wicked Farmer gets his allowance as usual without any comment.

I feel sure there must be a moral somewhere in this story proving the rightness of the right and the wrongness of the wrong, but so far it has eluded me.

This attitude with regard to those who practise economy is not by any means new, or due to special conditions caused by the war; it has been the keynote of official administration for generations, but previously it was directed chiefly against their own kind and the 'Higher Ups' taught their juniors a lesson whenever they were caught economising, whether they committed the offence deliberately or by accident. Moreover, the attitude is not confined to civil government only, but is practised in all the services and is observed generally wherever the British flag flies. It operates particularly in the case of annual grants made by the financial department for a whole variety of reasons such as painting battleships, training of troops, upkeep and repair of buildings, maintaining necessary stocks of stationery, and so on. As Finance, whether it is British, Colonial or Dominion, desires to effect economy above all things, recipients

of these grants are exhorted in moving terms to do their utmost to save something from these grants, and innocent and confiding soldiers, sailors and officials sometimes respond to this appeal with regard to some item and save a few pounds. They do this only once in their service, for officialdom has only one reply to this form of economy, and that is a permanent cut in this particular grant for all time. Men may come and men may go, screeds of pathetic appeals may be written to regain that which has been lost, and for a cancellation of the decree reducing it, but 'all thy piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line; nor all thy tears wash out one word of it'.

Frequently also it does not stop here, for officialdom goes a step further and cuts at the same time other ships, military commands and departments. When this happens furious ships' captains, Brigadiers and Governors go out looking for the traitor who has let the side down, and the culprit learns never to make the same mistake again.

Therefore it is the unwritten law in all the services that every penny of every conceivable grant is to be expended before the close of the financial year, and woe betide the head clerk, orderly room clerk, accountant or other official who overlooks a small balance. Throughout the British Isles and all our dependencies sailors, soldiers and officials during the month of March are putting in rush orders for paints and paint brushes, bricks and cement, stationery and blotting paper and every other commodity in their efforts to expend the uttermost farthing of their grants, for they know the penalty which awaits them.

Once in my gullible youth I made the mistake of owning up to an economy, but never again. I was newly appointed as Governor of Sinai at the time and one of my tasks, and my pet hobby, was the construction and maintenance of roads across the desert. One year there was a rebellion on one frontier and a political rising on the other, and owing to these distractions I was unable to get on with the work as usual. Of the £3,000 allowed for roads £1,000 remained unexpended at the end of the financial year. I wrote a most touching letter describing how the economy had occurred and a most impassioned appeal for the £1,000 to be added to next year's budget to

enable me to carry out the work which had been neglected. As any experienced official could have told me, I was merely wasting ink and paper. That £1,000 disappeared, and in future my road allowance was £2,000 instead of £3,000. This would most certainly have been a permanent state of affairs but for a heaven-sent opportunity.

The only thing an official can do in these circumstances is to bide his time and wait for an opportunity to bring home to higher authority the result of its false economy. The ordinary man might regard this as pure spite, but I prefer to look upon it as legitimate retaliation combined with a form of higher education. In the case of my Sinaitic roads I had the opportunity of driving a senior member of the Finance Ministry, responsible for my difficulties, across the peninsula to Palestine shortly after my road grant was reduced, and so I chose a car with the least resilient springs, and I drove it myself. Now there is a certain art in driving a car over a bumpy desert road. If one takes a switchback or hollow at a slight angle the car sways gently over the rough part, but if, on the other hand, one takes it head-on there is a jarring bump on to the back axle. The gentle manipulation of the accelerator at what is called the psychological moment has also much to do with it. The senior member from Finance progressed from bump to bump for 150 miles from one frontier to the other, and the first thing he did when he was fit to hold a pen again was to return to me the pilfered £1,000.

On the whole I have been lucky in the opportunities I have had to bring home salient points to higher authority and assist their education. During the last war I had during the rainy season some bell tents for my small command which were quite unfit for service, and I wrote letter after letter on the subject. They were completely ignored. Then one day the man responsible for tentage came to our part of the front on inspection, and by a lucky chance decided to stay the night. Having seen him comfortably installed in a very carefully selected tent the officers of the battalion then held a short divine service and prayed for rain. The prayers of the righteous are always answered: rain fell in bucketsful all night, and in forty-eight hours the battalion obtained completely new tentage.



*The prayers of the righteous are always answered: rain fell in
bucketsful all night*

As all cavalry and gunner officers will agree, one of the most difficult things to achieve in this world is to have a horse cast from the service as unfit so long as it has a leg to stand on. Even when an animal's physical disabilities stick out a foot or more it is practically impossible to get those responsible to see them or feel them, while to condemn a horse because it is unmanageable is regarded merely as a confession of gross bad horsemanship, as the animal would be quite amenable in experienced hands. The peculiarity about horsey people is that all of them possess good hands, but when put to it they cannot think of anyone else with this invaluable attribute.

In my early days in Egypt I had in my command a horse which no one could ride. I do not know if it was due to bad breaking or bad horsemanship in the first place, but whatever the cause there was no doubt whatsoever about the finished product, for immediately anyone mounted him he lay down in his tracks. If prevented from doing this in his favourite manner, which resembled that of a camel, he reared up and went over backwards. If banged over the head to stop him rearing he sprang sideways into a wall, tree or barbed wire entanglement or backwards into a *wadi*, and he did not mind how much he hurt himself provided he hurt his rider also.

As a horse like this is not of much use in a hard-working police force, with long patrols to perform every day, I wrote a letter to higher command asking that he should be cast. I received a reply from a horsey senior that he knew the animal well, that there was nothing whatsoever wrong with him in capable hands, and that there could be no question of replacement. A month later this horsey senior arrived in my district and required a good horse to be waiting for him at the railway station three miles away. I had sixteen horses in my command from which to make a selection, but on only one of these had the inspecting officer expressed a favourable opinion. He therefore got the horse, which in my ignorance I thought to be a *budmash*, but which he knew to be a good one. When eventually he arrived on foot, covered with dust and with torn riding breeches, I found it most difficult to convince him that I had acted with the best possible intentions.

Chapter Nine

On Patients and Patience

At the time of writing I have been reminded by some remarks made by Lord Croft, speaking on behalf of the Secretary of State for War, that if as a Home Guard officer I should be foolish enough to get wounded on an exercise I must not expect to be treated as an officer in a military hospital. According to Lord Croft an endeavour will be made by the R.A.M.C. in charge to play musical chairs with their cot patients, and get a special ward cleared for such a queer isolation case that it must not come in contact with commissioned, warrant or other ranks, but I can disabuse myself of the idea that I shall be allowed to mix with the officers and drink medicines with them. This was the lop-sided arrangement promised by Lord Croft when he had the unpleasant task of explaining away a silly decision made by the War Office that Home Guard officers were only 3rd Class Railway Warrant-Officers and, having volunteered to serve without pay, must suffer all the indignities that this country heaps invariably on any man guilty of such short-sighted behaviour.

It is, however, not intended to harp on the wrongs of the Home Guard, but rather to record some personal impressions of military hospitals obtained during two wars. This sounds as if I had been an habitual occupant of hospital wards instead of being in the front line which is not the case, but I am subject to a slight internal condition, which, in the general atmosphere of enteric, every doctor thinks may be this serious disease, so that at the first signs of indigestion and two degrees of temperature I am bundled off as an enteric suspect with a green 'E' painted on the bottom of every plate and cup I use. Five days later, with temperature at normal, I am bundled out again as a fraud, and am exceedingly glad to be a free man once more, and at liberty to order a whisky and soda or gin and bitters—if available. Incidentally I have also been in hospital with a gunshot wound and a scorpion sting, but a marked feature of my case, whatever form it may take, is that the doctor in charge after the first glance at me

marks me at once for barley water or lemonade—sometimes both—and at the same time it strikes him that the rest of the ward would be all the better for some stimulant. Therefore, having condemned me to these dreary and insipid liquids, he marks the man in the next bed for two ports, the man on the other side for two whiskies and sodas, and the fellow across the way for two Guinnesses; and all over the ward is heard the hiss of the siphon or pop of the cork whilst I sip the product of the lemon. This of course has impressed itself on my mind to such an extent that I never see the R.A.M.C. badge now without a dryness of the mouth due to fear and thirst.

In connection with this marking up of patients for alcoholic stimulants, which is not so usual now as it was in the good old days, I recall a story, which I do not believe, of two men in adjoining beds in a large ward, one of whom was marked up for a pint of Guinness's stout every day, whilst the other was on barley water. The man who was marked for the stout was a temperance addict and loathed the sight of it, while the fellow on barley water had a healthy taste for alcohol and his mouth watered at the sight of it. Instead of surreptitiously exchanging drinks at meal times when Sister was not looking, the silly fellows changed charts, and caused an incredible amount of confusion and worry to the staff, as well as themselves, before the ruse was discovered.

The man marked for stout was suffering from general debility and a sub-normal temperature, while the barley water man was a high blood pressure case with a temperature a trifle above normal. With the changes in treatment, medicine and everything else the two patients developed extraordinary symptoms—the general debility's temperature dropping a few degrees above freezing and the high blood pressure being found reading the Bible in a bath of cold water.

The first thing that strikes one in connection with a military hospital is the extraordinary hours it keeps. There are two places where time goes all too slowly: one is when one travels as a passenger in a liner, and the other when one is a patient in a hospital. Yet in both, although the whole day lies blank and featureless before one, there is this extraordinary craze for early rising. One's bedroom

steward on board ship—unless one is quite firm with him on the first day of the voyage, with sinister hints about the size of tips depending on service—will bring the early morning tea at 5.30 a.m. and have one out fully dressed on deck at 6.30 with two hours and a half to wait for breakfast. The same thing occurs in hospital, but here as one is a patient with no rights whatsoever, and with what amounts to a loss of citizenship, there is no question of being firm with Sister—the boot is very much on the other foot—and so one has to accept the situation. Early tea is here administered by the night sister at the first crack of dawn before she goes off duty, so as to leave the hours of daylight clear for the day staff to perform its great task—the work for which it was created.

After a restless night one has fallen into a deep and refreshing sleep at about 4 a.m. to be awakened almost immediately by a crisp and cheerful feminine voice: 'Wake up—wake up, and drink your tea! All the rest of the ward have finished theirs twenty minutes ago. Hurry up now!'

One peers out of the blankets and sees the pale beams of dawn creeping up the eastern sky, and one realises that it is 6 a.m., with thirteen hours of daylight and boredom in front of one. The resolve to turn over and go to sleep again immediately the tea is swallowed is immediately dispelled, for a moment later the day staff come on duty and the ward springs to busy life. Down the passage one hears the rapid tap-tap of Sister's shoes like a Vickers-Maxim firing a short burst; orderlies hurry past with piles of sheets and blankets; junior nurses, tapping more rapidly than Sister, flit from bed to bed popping thermometers from yawning mouth to Lysol basin, and back again; charts are written up; bed baths administered; pillows tossed and blankets stripped; and bedside tables with their cherished personal oddments and books turned upside down and dusted. The whole ward is a hum of feverish activity suggestive, not of the peace and rest of an hospital, but of the assembly room of a mass production tank factory carrying out a rush order for the 8th Army.

Then comes breakfast, over which one must hurry, gulping down scalding tea, for work has only just started. Afterwards the staff

really get down to it, scrubbing floors, moving beds, smoothing sheets and pillows, which on no account must be disturbed afterwards. Wounded legs and arms are unwrapped and displayed neatly on their gauze and bandages like prime cuts in a butcher's shop at Christmas time, and then the whole ward is dressed by the right—folded blankets, turned back sheets, wounded limbs and upturned feet being all part of the scheme of 'Right Markers'. When this has been completed under the eye of Sister there is a moment of great tension, comparable only to that immediately before a new battleship starts to move off the stocks after the christening bottle has been broken on its bows; and then in walks a R.A.M.C. captain in all his military medical majesty to do his rounds.

One realises then that it is not the patients who matter and their comfort and rest, but that the hospital is run solely to provide a daily ceremonial parade in keeping with the dignity of the R.A.M.C. But as nine-tenths of the doctors serving in war time are civilians who dislike this military precision in connection with their profession, and a very large proportion of the younger members of the R.A.M.C. agree with them, it is a mystery why the custom dies so hard.

I hope I am not being unjust, but I think the responsibility lies with the senior nursing staff, and as a sense of discipline is not a recognised characteristic of the female of the species this is difficult to account for. The average woman of to-day has no marked tendency to admire and almost worship the ordinary male, however noble his calling may be; and in the nursing service, where the staff have had the opportunity from their earliest days of seeing man as a patient with all his little weaknesses, his fretfulness and other failings shown up, it is remarkable that after years spent in hospitals they should still maintain that spirit of adoration of, and blind subservience to, that almost god-like being, the Doctor, who after all is only a despised male like the rest of us. Whenever I hear a matron or nursing sister say in a revered and hushed voice, 'Here's the Doctor,' I feel inclined to uncover my head, put dust upon it and remain uncovered in the presence of a deity.

The only consolation I obtain from all this is that when a nursing sister marries a doctor—a quite common occurrence—all this blind adoration goes by the board in the first six months, and after that she treats him just as if he were an ordinary husband, and one cannot say fairer than that! I know of the wife of a famous ex-Ambassador who thinks he is no use at all, as he cannot be trusted to look after breeding rabbits, while the female consort of a designer of 40,000 ton battleships considers she has had a raw deal because her husband cannot cope with a leaking bath-tap. I suspect—and hope—that there are at least a round dozen Harley Street specialists who cut no ice at all in their wives' eyes because they cannot grow a decent row of onions.

I think one of the most frightful crimes I have committed in the course of my life was to usurp the authority and position of the Doctor. It was the last day of my five days' incarceration as an enteric suspect, and I was going out at midday with a clean bill of health. The night before a new patient had been brought into my ward, and he woke up bright and cheery, drank his cup of tea, lit a cigarette and said he had never felt fitter in his life.

'What happens now?' he asked. 'They'd no right to bring me to this damned place as there is nothing wrong with me, and I want to get back to my battery. I suppose I can get up?'

'Good Lord, no,' I said. 'You've got to stay in bed until the Doctor comes round and sees you about 11 a.m.'

'What about my bath?' he said. 'You've just had yours.'

'That's different,' I said in a superior tone. 'I'm marked fit for discharge—you're a new patient. You'll get your bath all right—you'll be bed-bathed by the V.A.D.'

'What?' said the patient in a voice of horror, 'That pretty dark girl?'

'Yes,' I said sadistically. 'She'll bustle in here in a moment, put a screen round your bed, strip you to the buff and wash you all over.'

'My God! How perfectly frightful!' and he blushed as far down as the V opening of his pyjamas. 'I couldn't stand it. Don't you think I might hop off and have my bath in the bathroom? I feel as fit as a fiddle.'

'Well, I'll have a look at your chart,' I said professionally, and seeing his temperature was normal added, 'I don't think it would do you any harm if you do get up and go to the bathroom—only hurry up or you'll be caught.'

Twenty minutes later the pretty V.A.D. bustled in with her basin, sponge and soap, and started to move the screen from the corner of the ward.

'Come on,' she said commandingly to the new patient. 'I'm going to bath you.'

'You can't,' he said, gripping the sheet firmly and pulling it up round his neck. 'I've just done it myself—had a lovely hot bath in the bathroom, and washed behind my ears and everything.'

'How dare you! You had no business to get out of bed until the Doctor has seen you. I shall report you to Sister.'

Sister was even sterner than the V.A.D.—her face lent itself naturally to the mood—and when the freshly-washed officer was asked why he had disobeyed orders the coward gave me away basely.

'The officer over there looked at my chart and seeing it was normal gave me permission to go and have my bath in the bathroom', he said, and then the two outraged females, as one woman, turned and rent me. How dared I take upon myself the management of the ward, inciting officers to mutiny, and how dared I, miserable combatant officer that I was, presume to give orders that only the Doctor could give. Such a thing had never occurred before in the history of the R.A.M.C., and so on. When finally I slunk out of hospital like a whipped cur my temperature was up five points above normal and my reflexes suggested I was on the verge of a serious nervous breakdown.

While on the topic of Sisters and V.A.D.'s there is one little point that a patient should bear in mind all the time. He may call the V.A.D. of the ward 'nurse', 'volunteer', 'Miss Smith', 'Dorothy' and even 'Darling', but he must remember never on any account to call her 'Sister' in the hearing of members of the regular female staff. The point is that a nurse is not a Sister until she is 'trained'



Then the two outraged females, as one woman, turned and rent me.



*He must remember never on any account
to call her 'Sister'.*

and on the regular staff. A V.A.D. may have attended several courses of instruction in peace-time, and worked like a slave in a casualty clearing station for three years of war, helping the Doctor with every conceivable form of ghastly wound; but she still remains quite 'untrained', and therefore well below the salt in the nursing service. Even in

the Thirty Years War, I believe the V.A.D.'s who served from the beginning were still 'untrained' when finally peace was proclaimed.

The first time I went into hospital I made this ghastly *gaffe*, and, as the V.A.D. was extremely good looking and most popular, and the Sister only homely and not very forthcoming, the situation created was rather more tense than it would have been otherwise. Unfortunately when corrected I attempted to argue, and had got as far as making the blasphemous remark that the V.A.D. was as clever as any trained nurse I had met when the hospital tent was struck by lightning, and fell on top of us—patient, Sister and V.A.D.

I admit there was a very nasty thunderstorm lurking over Pretoria at the time, and the hospital tents were pitched on the side of a kopje with iron ore outcrops, but all the same I was brought up to believe that one ran the risk of being struck dead for blasphemy, and I have a suspicion the thunderbolt was aimed at me.

My first admission to a military hospital was due to a scorpion sting. There are two varieties of scorpion—a 'greenery yallery' one and a black one—and the black species is said to be far more poisonous than the yellow. It was a yellow one which stung me, and I am willing to offer my deepest sympathy to anyone stung by a black one. It was not the scorpion's fault, as I was sleeping on the

veldt in my rolled blankets on a cold night, and the poor little fellow was looking for company and warmth. When reveille went the scorpion was the first to move and I, rising half a minute later, put my hand on him as he walked away, whereupon to call attention to the fact I was hurting him he stung me in the wrist.

I was given an anti-scorpion injection and carted off to hospital, but as this took two days in a mule waggon, I had recovered from the sting when I arrived. I have, however, a very vivid recollection of the throbbing pain I suffered during the first night in the waggon. One of the drawbacks of campaigning on short rations where green vegetables never figure is that the blood does not throw off any poisons introduced into the system as is the case in normal conditions, hence the desert sores in Libya, the trench feet of the last war in France, and the veldt sores of the South African war. The aftermath of my scorpion sting was a very nasty abscess on my wrist, which was more painful than the actual sting and which left me with a stiff wrist. This was ultimately rectified, but the method of achieving it was such that it destroyed for all time my faith in human nature.

My hand after the abscess was gone was set at right angles to my arm, and the muscles and joints of the wrist being temporarily seized up I could not move it. The doctor used to come into the ward every morning, look at it and say: 'if you don't get that wrist working again soon you'll have it stiff for life, and serve you damn well right. Work it up and down, and don't be afraid if it hurts you a bit.' After half a minute trying to 'work it up and down' I came to the conclusion the doctor could never have had a stiff wrist due to a scorpion's sting and abscess, for the agony if I moved it a fraction of an inch was so excruciating that I broke into a cold sweat.

This went on from day to day, with the doctor becoming angrier and more contemptuous of my cowardice, until one bright morning he came into the ward and his whole mood had changed. Apparently I was no longer a trooper of Yeomanry and a most unsatisfactory and cowardly patient, but a man for whom he cherished the warmest feelings of friendship. With his face wreathed in smiles he advanced

on me with extended hand, saying: 'Well, well, how are we this morning?'

Flattered by his condescension, and ignoring the fact that it was not customary for Doctors to shake hands with their patients, I held out my hand, which he gripped with the clasp of true friendship. I could tell by the firm hold he had on my palm that he was inspired by a feeling of real comradeship, and at that moment the orderly, who was his accomplice in the base betrayal and deception, stepped from behind him and grabbed my forearm with a grip like a steel trap.

To quote from the Victorian novelists of fifty years ago we will draw a veil over the scene which ensued, but, after we had been round the ward twice with the Doctor working my hand up and down like a pump handle the whole time, I had a wrist more supple than that of Paderewski, and could probably have played the piano better if only I had been taught the instrument in my youth. But I have never been able since to shake hands with any member of the R.A.M.C. with any degree of confidence.

Chapter Ten

On the Elements

Competent authorities appear to be somewhat vague as to what is, and what is not, an element. The popular belief is that there are four: fire, air, earth and water, but an Encyclopedia puts their number as high as ninety-two, and this leaves a very substantial margin for an inaccurate writer like myself. The exact meaning of the word also is most involved, as it varies from being 'a first principle' and 'one of the essential parts of anything' to 'the



*Almost anything you cannot dissect or control
comes within the category.*

simplest known constituents supposed to be the foundation of everything.' One way and another it seems to me that almost anything you cannot dissect or control comes within the category. For instance, in the East I served under a chief who was what one might call an element; that is to say he seemed to be a constituent part of everything, he was all things to all men, nothing to any particular man, one could never pin him down to anything, and he 'came like water and like wind he went'.

On the argument that an element is something which is an essential part, but which one cannot control, I decided to write a series of articles on the elements I have met at home and abroad. The first is water, about which I know quite a lot and which has usually defeated me. I could think of very little to say about fire, but earth, when it takes the form of sand, is certainly an element, for it is even harder to manage than water.

This leaves air, a most intangible thing about which to write as there are only four varieties of air: fresh air, stale air, cold air and hot air. Hot air, however, provides an inspiration, for under hot air comes mendacity, and mendacity is a wonderful and far-reaching subject. For years I lived and had my being in an aura of it, and now that I have retired I continue to meet it in varied and minor forms, so that it is not stretching a point unduly if one regards it as 'an essential part' of life. On going into the matter of mendacity further I have come to the conclusion that it is necessary to sub-divide the mass of material into 'Oriental Lies' and 'Occidental Lies'. There is only one drawback to this, which is, that after the magnificence of Oriental mendacity, the puny attempts of my fellow-countrymen may come as bathos.

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I.-Water

The title of this chapter may sound somewhat insipid and uninspiring, but it has the virtue of being an adequate description of the contents, for it is about water and nothing else. It is admitted that there is nothing very exciting about a jug of cold water run out of a tap or poured into a radiator, but, when one comes to deal with the element on a larger scale and in its natural state, it provides a variety of excitements and surprises, and some of these are most disconcerting. The trouble about water is that there never seems to be any happy medium with it; there is either far too much or far too little. One may read in one's morning

paper on the same day of thousands of sheep dying from thirst in Australia after a two-year's drought, and in the next column find an account of a Kansas farmer being washed out of the top storey of his house by a Missouri flood. Also water hates to be controlled; it likes to go its own sweet way. If one is a qualified water engineer and has learned all the formulas governing the secrets of water; the downward thrust of its weight when confined in a tank, the degree of pressure it can exert against a dam, and the height to which it can be raised by various types of pumps, dealing with it is more or less shorn of its excitements, for one has taken a mathematical advantage of the liquid's hidden resources; but even when it is controlled and manipulated by an expert it has frequently an unexpected trump card, or rather the Joker, up its sleeve.

One way and another I seem to have had quite a lot to do with water. For twenty years in the deserts of Egypt I never had enough, and I dug for it, divined for it, made dams to hold it, channels in which to run it, and installed pumps to lift it. Since I retired to England I seem to have spent my entire time trying to get rid of it, and have had just as much work making drains, sumps, and pipelines to dispose of the surplus as I had in the past to obtain a small supply. This, however, merely goes to prove the soundness of the theory of relativity. The tiny brook, which in Britain is merely a nuisance, to be run off the land into a ditch as expeditiously as possible, would be in the East a priceless boon, meaning life and prosperity to a community of several hundred souls. In the Bible and in many old Arabian books Damascus is mentioned as being the most wonderful city in the world, 'The city of praise; the city of my joy.' Actually there is nothing very wonderful about Damascus or its setting beyond the fact that the two rivers, Abana and Pharphar, almost meet in the city and then spread out across the desert, providing irrigation for many square miles of orchard and corn land before disappearing into the sands of Eastern Syria. The popularity of Damascus was due entirely to its abundant supply of flowing sweet water, which was remarkable in the eyes of scribes accustomed only to brackish wells and stagnant tanks.

It is marvellous to see in the rugged hillsides of Palestine, Syria, or Trans-Jordan how some tiny mountain stream is brought by means of small earth channels from the rocky heights above to every tiny plot of flat land on its course where a few vegetables and fruit trees can find roots. The greatest ingenuity is shown in maintaining the level, with just the correct amount of fall to enable the water to run quickly, but not too quickly; and where a salient in the form of a gorge occurs in the hillside the little channel runs into it, crossing it at some spot possibly three hundred yards away, to reappear on the opposite side still maintaining its even flow. There is nothing very modern in these primitive water channels, and one must remember that the levels which seem so marvellous have been arrived at by the system of trial and error over a period of possibly three thousand years or more. Long stretches of them are washed away with every rainstorm during the winter months, to be rebuilt immediately the dry spell sets in, and in many places the water flows through a channel cut in the natural rock or runs along a miniature aqueduct of solid stone and cement; but construction such as these are not modern; for they are the indestructible remnants of a well-designed system of irrigation dating back to the days of the Romans. The point to remember, however, is that the tiny stream, on the conservation of which hundreds of thousands have toiled their lives away during the generations, would be merely a road-damaging, water-logging nuisance in Great Britain, and our farmers and road engineers would shove it into pipes and run it straight to the nearest river to get rid of it.

It is, however, not my intention to write a treatise on the various irrigation systems of the Middle East, but rather to describe my own amateurish struggles to obtain a sufficiency of water to fill my morning bath, and, when this was accomplished, to run any surplus there might be on to the land for the sake of vegetables and fruit. At my first station, Ikingi Mariut, in the eastern portion of the Libyan Desert, I had a small one-storeyed bungalow set in the midst of a treeless waste of clay and gravel, and in the enclosure, which was a garden two thousand years ago, as was indicated by fallen stone walls,

there was a Roman well. This well had plenty of water of sorts at the bottom, but it lay over thirty feet down and there was no pump or contrivance for lifting it. In those primitive days a desert official was left very much to his own devices, the theory being that if he could not manage to look after himself in the waste-places of the earth he had better find some employment where life was easier. This may sound a ruthless theory, but there is much to recommend it.

At Ikingi the water difficulty was solved by my orderly, Mabruk (the Arabic word for 'Congratulations'), a Sudanese corporal in the police force. He was not a very large man, but he had a compelling and propelling way with him when dealing with prisoners, and he had the loudest voice I have ever heard. His chief attribute as far as I was concerned lay in the fact that he was a black Mr. Middleton: to him life without a garden was inconceivable. Wherever he might be stationed in the desert he contrived some tiny patch surrounded by thorn bushes, in which he grew a few elongated radishes, a tomato plant or two, and possibly a red-hot pepper which were kept alive by draughts from his water bottle.

Mabruk dealt with the irrigation question at Ikingi by the very primitive and Oriental method of hauling it to the surface in buckets and depositing it at the top in the old Roman cistern. All day long he exhorted the prison gang with raucous yells to haul, and haul more rapidly, and at 5 p.m. in the evening the raucous yells became one long sustained scream when the precious stored water was run through the irrigation channels to the small garden below. We solved the water problem at Ikingi, but I could not help the feeling that the general principle was uneconomical and, but for a generous supply of prisoners and a most exceptional instigating force in the form of Mabruk, it would have been a failure.

In Sinai we had the water difficulty in many forms, and although in a wet winter every wadi, or torrent bed, was a roaring yellow flood on several occasions during the rainy months, this did nothing to remedy the general shortage during the summer. The big Wadi El Arish, the Biblical river of Egypt, used sometimes to come down as wide as the Thames at Richmond, and there was always the

attractive prospect of damming it at some suitable spot and holding back sufficient water for extensive irrigation. There were several drawbacks to the scheme, such as rapid evaporation, soakage, and the excessive cost of the undertaking, which would be out of all proportion to the value of the land to be irrigated and the number of people who would benefit by it. I estimated that a dam, strong enough to stand up to some of the enormous floods we experienced, would have to be about one-third the size and strength of the great Assuan barrage which cost the Egyptian Government the best part of a million pounds.

To obtain some idea of what the soakage and evaporation would be I made a temporary dam of earth reinforced with stakes and scrub bushes, and was lucky enough at the end of the winter to get just the right sized flood to fill it and no more. A big rush of water would have swept away the whole of my construction in half a minute, but this obliging flood, which came down unexpectedly owing to some local cloudburst miles away in the desert, just filled it to the brim and then ceased to flow. The first indication I had of the presence of water was a flight of pintail duck disporting themselves in the distance over what I imagined to be barren sandy desert, but on investigation I found a lake over a mile long and some hundred yards wide which was covered with duck of half a dozen different varieties. This afforded proof that during the migration season the duck travelling homewards to Northern Europe do not all fly up the Nile Valley following the water, as was originally supposed, but that quite a considerable number take a direct route across the desert.

My pool of water lasted three months before it evaporated and soaked away entirely, and during that time I had some excellent bags of teal, widgeon, mallard and pintail, whilst the grazing and wild animals used it as a watering-place. After the water disappeared the local Arabs came down and grew water-melons of incredible size in the half-dried mud, which the gazelle and foxes of the desert ate with avidity. All things considered the dam appeared to have been a great success, for it met with the approval of all the denizens of the

desert. The following year, however, there came down a mighty flood, which I watched from my house some ten miles below the dam. Suddenly the roar of rushing water increased in volume of sound, and I saw sweeping down on top of the flood a surging, tossing yellow wall some five feet high, and I knew that my dam was gone.

The second dam I made was a cement and stone construction, which was intended to be permanent. This was built not in the Wadi El Arish but across the mouth of a narrow gorge in the shoulder of a nearby mountain, and the idea was to form a permanent watering-place for the nomad Arabs who cultivated a large amount of barley in the area. The nearest well to the cultivation was some six miles away, and, though this distance did not worry the lordly Beduin at all, it was a cause of complaint on the part of their wives and daughters, who had to walk that distance (and back) with pots on their heads.

The scheme appeared to be perfectly sound for the dam was built on a solid foundation of rock and reinforced with lengths of railway metal; the situation was suitable, as every local rainstorm appeared to concentrate on the spot; and when the dam filled it would hold back within the mountain-side a pool of water fifteen feet deep and about ten acres in extent. This was the general theory, but things did not happen that way at all, because for the next three years not a drop of rain fell in that particular watershed. Three miles to the north raging floods would sweep away yards of the motor road and the same thing would occur to the south, but my particular gorge escaped it all and remained dry and arid with the dam standing as a useless monument to wasted endeavour.



With pots on their heads.

Then one year, when I had begun to think I had put the black curse of drought on the area for all time, the rain made a mistake and fell heavily all over the mountain, the dam filled to the brim and, what was still more remarkable, stood the strain. I went down specially to gloat over my success, and saw as I had hoped a huge stretch of deep water, at which the nomads would obtain their supplies for months to come; for the whole depression behind was filled and the water was lapping over the sill. The Arabs came up and thanked me effusively. 'Wallahi! never in the lifetime of man has such a water supply been created, and no other man could have done it!' I accepted their flattery with becoming modesty, and then at the height of the congratulations and adulations I noticed something which caused a moment's uncertainty, a sort of catch at the heart-strings. I watched, and the uncertainty became a reality. In ten minutes the level of the water had dropped; it was no longer lapping over the sill of the dam, but was two inches below. We waited half an hour, and the congratulations turned to consolations. 'After all, if we have only one foot of water it is better than nothing.' But unfortunately they did not get one foot; for in twenty-four hours the dam was dry and not one drop remained. The explanation was quite simple, and I suppose any qualified engineer or geologist would have foreseen it. The rocky sides of the mountain at this spot had a sharp downward tilt, and the whole of my carefully stored water had run away to the bowels of the earth through the cracks in the strata.

In justification to myself I must explain that not all my efforts to conserve water were conspicuous failures; for some of the dams I constructed were a success or had only minor defects; there were well-bores which exceeded expectations, and repairs to Roman works that made them as sound as they had been when the original masons completed their task; and one cannot hope for anything better than that. There is, however, nothing very exciting about an enterprise which succeeds at the first time, and that is why I am recording only those occasions when the surprise factor played its part.

In the days when the Romans exploited North-eastern Sinai far more extensively than is the case to-day, they had a system of storing

water in underground cisterns carved out of solid rock which the Arabs call *harabas*. These cisterns, which are of vast size, fill up during the rain in the winter, and, being immune from both soakage and evaporation, the water remains in them for a year or more, according to the demands made upon the supply. In the course of centuries they have all become filled to the top with silt, but repairing them did not consist solely of removing the rubbish; for it was discovered that most of them had developed slight cracks owing to shifting of the strata caused by earth tremors.

There was a particularly large one on the main track across Sinai which we cleaned out and repaired thoroughly by carefully sealing up all the cracks with cement. In the floor of this cistern was a large circular hole where the weight of water had broken away the rock and this hole we filled with solid concrete. Then the rains came, filled the vast *haraba* to the brim—it was sixty feet by sixty feet and twenty feet deep—and to celebrate the occasion I presented a fruit garden to an old Arab who had an encampment near by. We fenced an acre of land with wire and put in it a hundred selected trees of fig, olive, vine and apricot. The work was completed, the last tree planted, and the workmen had gone to the *haraba* with buckets to carry out the first watering.

I saw them pause and start an argument at the entrance, raising their hands in expostulation, and I asked the old Arab what was wrong.

‘They say they can’t get the water, Effendim,’ he replied with a sunny smile.

‘Why not?’

‘They say there isn’t any because the *haraba* is empty.’

It was. While we were toiling in the garden the weight of water had suddenly pushed down my solid block of concrete, filling the hole in the bottom, as one pushes a badly fitting cork into a bottle inadvertently by pressing too hard with the corkscrew, and the whole contents of the cistern had swirled away merrily to the bowels of the earth. The only person present who was in no way disconcerted by this terrible disaster was the old Arab. His rugged brown

face was wreathed in happy smiles and I guessed the reason; he was congratulating himself on the fact that he would not have to toil with buckets all the summer, watering the trees that I had forced upon him, and he won all along the line; for, rather than lose the orchard now that it was planted I went to the expense, or rather the Government did, of sending a water tank lorry there every fortnight. He only escaped the burden for one year, however; for when the *haraba* was repaired for the second time the concrete was reinforced with iron bars and they stood the strain.

My next exploit concerned a well I dug about three miles from El Arish, and the site was selected with considerable care. I got a water diviner to walk over the spot with a twig, and he stated that he had obtained positive results. I may say he was not a professional diviner: his calling was that of railway engineer, and he took up searching for water as a hobby and to oblige. I also used a divining instrument resembling a barometer, the needle of which was supposed to be dragged away from the zero when the apparatus was placed over water. This mechanical diviner was even more enthusiastic than the human one, and the needle waggled so furiously that I expected confidently to strike an underground river.

The well when constructed was six feet wide, and at a depth of thirty feet we struck water. We went down until we had some nine feet of water, and then I bought a very special pump. It was of the centrifugal type, worked by an 8-H.P. engine at the top with a spindle revolving on its own axis and driving the pump, which was placed in the well some six feet above water level. The point about the centrifugal type is that it is a system of vanes whirling round in a circular chamber, which drives up the water in far greater volume and at a far faster rate than the ordinary piston pump. As I wanted a lot of water flowing quickly to irrigate a large orchard, it seemed to be the ideal type of pump for the job.

The usual large concourse of people turned up to see the new installation work. It is remarkable how I manage to draw big and enthusiastic crowds of onlookers when I am about to be discomfited. The engine started with a hearty sustained roar, the mechanic

quickened up the stroke, slipped in the gear and the spindle began to revolve furiously. Then there was a deep guttural 'Allah!' from the crowd as a four-inch jet of water shot in a solid cone some ten yards from the mouth of the delivery pipe. It was a most unqualified success; for the supply of water, considering the size of the well, was stupendous. In fact it was so stupendous that, realising my luck with water, I felt a slight misgiving whether the well would stand it, and at that moment it happened. The pipe gave a gurgle and splutter, the wonderful four-inch jet shrank to a tiny trickle, and then ceased to flow altogether. We had pumped the well dry in two minutes, and experiments later proved that the only method of working this greedy centrifugal was to allow the well to stand for two hours and refill, and then pump out the accumulated supply in a matter of a hundred seconds. This, of course, was uneconomical and impracticable, and the appliance was removed to make way for a slow-working windmill and piston pump. So far as I know the centrifugal is still waiting in store until some supply in arid Sinai is found which is worthy of its mettle. Unless they strike something in the nature of a second Nile or deep-flowing Danube it seems that it will remain permanently on the unemployed list.

It was in the oases of the Libyan Desert where I had most to do with water, for here I was faced with its problems all day and every day; in fact I was never allowed to forget it. We dug for it, we drained it away, we put oil on it, we taxed it, and always the people fought about it. In this spot they fought because the family on the adjoining plot took more than their fair share, and their own land was parched in consequence; in that spot they fought because the family on the adjoining plot took less than their fair share, and their own land was water-logged. A few miles away neither family had enough, and so they blamed the Government, and fought with the next village. One might say water gave everything in the oases except satisfaction; but then we were a peevish community, rotten with a thousand years of endemic malaria, and this gives one a jaundiced outlook on life.

These Libyan oases, of which there are five—Kharga, Dakhla,

Baharia, Farafra and Siwa—lie in deep depressions in the high desert of Libya, and being only a few feet above sea level the water flows to the surface in artesian fashion if wells are bored. The depths to which one has to dig for water vary: in Kharga it averages three hundred feet; in Dakhla some hundred feet less; whilst in the Baharia, where the artesian water only reaches the surface in certain spots, the *foggara* system is extensively employed. This consists of boring a well to water level and then leading it, through a long subterranean chamber until it reaches a low-lying spot where it can be used for irrigation purposes. These stone-lined *foggaras*, which are common in all Saharan oases, date back to the days of the Romans, and some of them are over a mile in length. I discovered a disused one in the northern part of Kharga, and hoping to find water went up it for about a quarter of a mile looking for its source. It was a most unpleasant experience; for there was only just enough room for me inside, and I had to share it with all the less attractive denizens of the oases—snakes, scorpions, bats and owls. In fact, I found almost everything in it except that for which I was searching, water.

Practically all the wells in Kharga and Dakhla are true artesian; for the water comes bubbling to the surface from the depths of the earth and runs away in small streams to the orchards, the date groves, and the corn cultivation. A few of these wells date back to the time of the Persians, the majority to the Roman period, while a great number, more than was necessary, were bored in the middle of last century, when a French engineer brought a modern plant to the oases.

I have never felt very much ashamed of the various set-backs and disappointments I experienced with water in the oases; for I had the satisfaction of knowing that it had previously misled and defeated half a dozen water engineers, the same number of irrigation-experts, a board of very astute financiers, and about twenty thousand shareholders. In the 'nineteen hundreds' a Corporation was formed to exploit Kharga's possibilities for corn, fruit and cotton growing, and some thousands of acres of desert land were leased from the Government. A trial well was bored which yielded a wonderful flow

of water, so work went ahead. A light railway to the Nile Valley was constructed, substantial buildings and stores erected, and a series of artesian wells bored, so that the whole area could be irrigated and put under cultivation. Then things began to happen, for it transpired that the supply of artesian water was by no means so inexhaustible as had been assumed, but on the other hand quite limited. If a new well was bored within half a mile of another already constructed it promptly drew off half the supply; and it was proved by the expensive method of trial and error that only one well could be bored in every square mile. Moreover the wells the company made in the north of the oasis drew off the water from the age-old ones at Kharga village eight miles away, and this caused vociferous complaints. Lastly, the soil proved to be most unsuitable; for there was much salt down below, and, shortly after the newly made gardens were irrigated, this salt rose to the surface and dried so that everything looked as if it were covered with hoar frost. After this discovery was made the company went into liquidation.

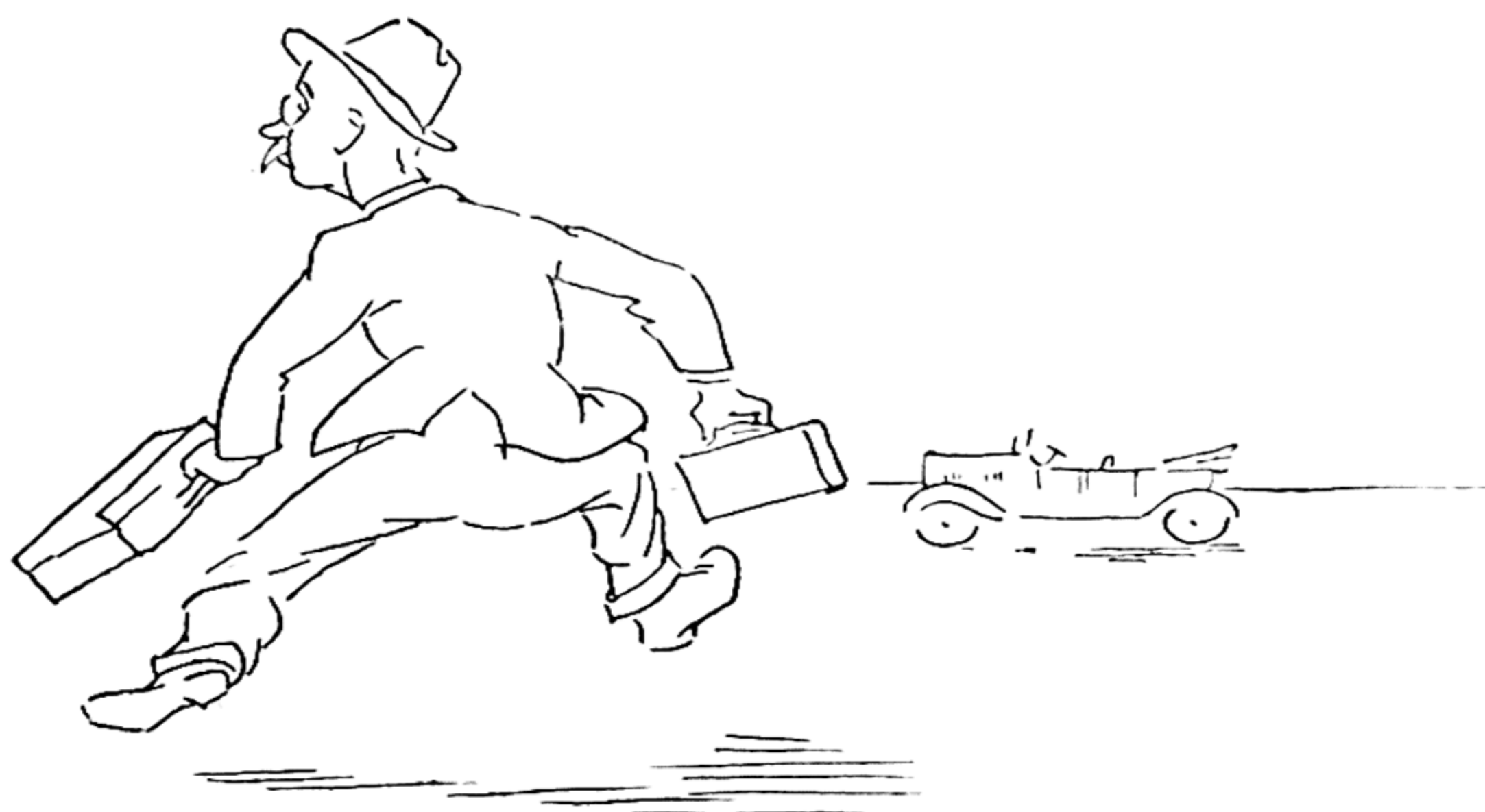
The first thing I was called upon to do in Kharga oasis was to take a hand in what was known as the Great Ain Sheikh Controversy. Ain Sheikh was a most prolific artesian well and it functioned just outside the village in a very low-lying spot. Here around the source seepage from its too abundant waters formed one of the finest mosquito hatcheries in Africa; it then continued its course, irrigating on its way several orchards which were already obtaining more water than they required from other wells; and then it went on into the sand dunes where it formed two respectable-sized lakes, innumerable pools, and about a mile and a half of marsh. Altogether it was a pretty good effort for one well.

I had instructions to inspect it and render a report on what should be done to remedy the evil. It struck me that my opinion was unlikely to be very valuable, because it was the first artesian well I had ever seen, and on looking at its surging flow I could not say much more about it than did the Irishman when he looked for the first time at the Niagara Falls and was asked what he thought of all the water roaring down into the depths; 'I don't see phwat there is to

stop ut.' Moreover, I viewed its inundations with mixed feelings; the pools by the village I could see were a bad thing, but the swamps and ponds beyond seemed in an entirely different category; for in the marshes I flushed the best part of a hundred snipe, and there were great packs of widgeon and mallard on the pools. It is very difficult for a keen snipe-shot to see anything radically wrong with a swamp.

The history of Ain Sheikh was that in pre-war days a British official, with about as much knowledge of water as I possessed, had visited the oasis and decided that the village must have its own water supply. He was most enthusiastic about it and, having made up his mind, called in the elders of the village for their opinion. They knew that there were many drawbacks and dangers in the scheme, but they knew also the English characteristic of resenting any advice except that which coincides with their preconceived notion. They said, therefore, that it would be simply splendid, and called on Allah to witness how grateful they were to the kindly and thoughtful inspector for his wonderful idea. So the well was bored, and it did exactly what the village elders expected; being in the lowest part of the oasis, it burst forth with uncontrolled violence and terrific volume, it flooded everything and everywhere, and it drained away the water from half a dozen wells on higher ground which were performing useful work. Shortly after this the British inspector was transferred to other spheres of work where water did not figure, and his well-boring activities were forgotten by everyone except the unfortunate inhabitants of Kharga who had to live surrounded by mosquito-ridden swamps.

The gist of the erudite report I rendered was to the effect that the waterflow should be stopped at source, but as I could offer no suggestion how this was to be done, a water and well expert was sent down to advise. He said that obviously it must be capped, and he wondered why it had not been done before; so we constructed a cap of concrete reinforced with metal, and fitted it on. The well blew it off promptly, whereupon we made a larger and heavier model and it blew this off also. Then the expert left hurriedly, and another came down who



Then the expert left hurriedly.

said the capping system was absurd and was bound to be a failure—it is extraordinary, but experts never seem to agree on a single thing. He advocated the blocking up of the bore with clay and concrete, so we got a well-boring plant and rammed down blue clay by the camel-load. When we had got this compacted, and the flow stopped for the first time in ten years, we put down concrete—two tons of it—and rammed this home. We really seemed to have made a job of it at last, but the following morning when we went down to inspect we found half a dozen small volcanoes at work in a circle round the old well, and they were all belching out water by the ton. We had stopped the bore efficiently enough, but the water forcing its way up from the depths of the earth had burst through the sides and made its way through the soil to the surface. As the situation was far worse than it had been before we started work, we withdrew our stopping from the bore, which was a far more laborious and expensive business than putting it in, and let the well carry on as usual. We were, therefore, in a position of *status ante quo*, and realising I had met my match I was content to leave it at that.

I understand that my successor at Kharga resolved to remove this blot on the British escutcheon and, obtaining the services of a third expert, arrived at the decision to bore another well, which would have its flow controlled by taps and which would draw off the force of water from Ain Sheikh. I have never been able to obtain from him a satisfactory explanation of what happened, but I gather that his new well refused to be controlled in any way, and that old Ain Sheikh and its young brother continue to flow on merrily as ever. If this is the case, the extent of the duck and snipe shoot must have vastly increased in size.

My arrival at Kharga in the first place had coincided with the completion of an up-to-date and much-needed hospital, which had been erected in a healthy spot well away from malaria swamps. It was a most excellent site in every respect but one—it had no water. The medical board who had selected the site had been so imbued with the idea of getting well away from water, because of its mosquito-hatching propensity, that they had quite overlooked the fact that the liquid has other uses than providing breeding haunts for anopheles' larvae; that is to say, it is drunk by some people and also employed as a medium for washing.

The result of this was that I was instructed to lay the water on immediately and was given £800 with which to do it. I was instructed to tap the nearest well some three-quarters of a mile away and to lay a pipe line to the hospital. There were many objections to this; in the first place, the nearest well was not particularly clean, it had an unsatisfactory flow, and lastly it lay some feet below the level of the hospital. Nobody has ever yet been able to convince a Government department of a theoretic fact such as that of the impossibility of causing water to flow uphill, because they think at once that one is merely being obstructive; and I was no exception to the rule. I was told to carry on with the piping schemes and not to raise objections, but being young and impulsive in those days I disobeyed orders deliberately and started to bore a new well.

I estimated I had ample money available to obtain artesian water, and, since I was five hundred miles away in the heart of the desert,

no one would know what I was doing; so I took one of the Government boring plants and engaged a gang of men to work it. It is a lengthy business boring with a hand rig through hard gravel, rock, and stiff blue clay, and oasis experts and the Oldest Inhabitant informed me I was having a much rougher passage to artesian water than was normally the case, but by putting two shifts on to the work, we continued our fight downwards. At 290 feet we expected to strike water—figures and statistics proved this conclusively—but figures and statistics, as usual, were wrong. We went on to 315 feet and no water, 325 and still no water; and then came the end of the Financial Year when all work must cease, all funds dry up automatically, and real labourers stop toiling while accountants and financial brains get busy finding out where all the money had gone.

This meant disaster of the greatest magnitude. I was a more or less new and untried official, and with flagrant disobedience of orders and something like £700 thrown away on failure, all I could expect was a return passage to the United Kingdom. My Egyptian assistant, however, was a man of resource, and he had a financial brain. By some method or another—a most irregular one—we drew out the last of the unexpended money and showed it as double overtime, and were thus able to keep the workmen going in treble shifts for another ten-days after the end of the Financial Year. The number of regulations, orders and instructions, not to mention finance traditions, which we set aside by this gross irregularity was such that I imagine we were both liable to something like ten years' penal servitude.

We saw to it that the labourers worked and worked unceasingly, and relay after relay, singing merrily, fell in to swing and jerk the heaving rig of the boom. We went on down to 330 feet and to 335, and all the oasis said they had never seen anything like it; it was the deepest bore since the days of the Romans. Then came the tenth and last day. We had reached 340 feet and no water, and at 6 p.m., two hours before the gang stopped work for the last time, I went slowly and sadly back to my house to compose a letter confessing my iniquity. It was a moving and dramatic piece of writing, and I was

about to add my signature when the door flew open and my Egyptian officer burst in. He was streaming with water, and his red tarbush flopped on his head like a damp, over-ripe tomato.

'We are saved,' he shouted. 'We struck water a minute before we stopped work—the biggest flow in Kharga! I was looking down the pipe listening for the water when it happened. It shot thirty feet into the air and nearly knocked my head off!'

Without a word I pushed a large whisky-and-soda into his hand. He was a very good Mahommedan, but he loved whisky, and the tot I gave him to celebrate our salvation nearly knocked his head off for the second time that afternoon.



II.-Sand

Recent operations in the Middle East have increased considerably the number of people who have learnt to their discomfort the significance of sand and its queer ways. In Great Britain, unless one happens to be a mason or a builder's contractor, sand is just sand—a yellow gritty substance which trickles into one's shoes at the seaside, with which some people struggle in their gardens as a medium for cultivation, and which gets into the greased wheels of government and military organisations. In the desert, on the other hand, sand is an element rather than a form of soil, and it is as irresistible and difficult to control as either fire or water. It is not content only to pile itself up into towering dunes or vast undulating sweeps, but must also enter into one's intimate life by drifting into one's house, one's food and even one's bed.

To realise the invincible might of sand it is necessary to view it in one of the big dune seas of the Libyan Desert, the largest of which is that which stretches from Siwa Oasis almost to the Sudan border, a distance of some three hundred and fifty miles. This vast area, which is approximately a hundred miles wide, is a series of great whale-backed dunes heaped one upon the other, all symmetrically perfect



It shot thirty feet into the air and nearly knocked my head off!

in shape with a sharp declivity in the form of a crescent on the southern side, and linked together by long arms called *seifs*, or swords. Those people who have come on deck in a mail steamer during a gale in the Atlantic and have looked across the grey and white waste of huge waves will recall the feeling of awe they experienced at seeing the ocean in one of its uncontrollable moods and will remember also the amazement they felt that a puny creature like man should devise anything capable of withstanding its force. On looking at the sea in these conditions one senses its majesty, and the fact that it is master of the situation.

This is precisely the feeling one has when one stands for the first time on an outlying dune in the Siwa sand sea, and looks out across huge billows a hundred to two hundred feet in height, which roll on apparently increasing in size until they fade into the haze of the horizon. One feels that to venture into the menacing waste in a small car is to court death, and as a matter of fact this is a fairly sound appreciation, as, if anything happens to the car or one should lose one's way, death from thirst or starvation is inevitable. Thanks to the presence in our Army of certain officers, who had devoted all their spare time as well as their annual leave to exploration of this desert, our armed patrols have crossed this terrible sand sea frequently and engaged the enemy with considerable success on the other side.

Although the powers and queer habits of water are known with some degree of certainty, the ways of sand are still more or less of an unknown quantity. We do not know why in some parts of the desert it decides to form itself into a dune with power to add to its number; why in others it is content to accumulate in vast level sweeps; why here the sand is all of large grains and as firm as a gravel path and there a hundred yards away as fine as powder with no resistance whatsoever; and why over big stretches of country it will not stay in, any circumstances, and during gales sweeps across plains of gravel, leaving them clean and bright without apparently depositing a single grain. The word apparently is used advisedly here, as when out with Arab trackers after partridges, hares and gazelle, and sometimes bigger game such as smugglers and raiders, I have been struck with the ease

with which these skilled trackers could follow the footprints when to my unpractised eye there was no mark of any sort in the hard surface of the gravel. I was then shown that under every tiny stone there is collected a minute patch of yellow sand—the size of a threepenny bit or even smaller. As the animal or criminal—or for that matter the man going about his lawful occasions—walks or runs across the desert he displaces a stone here and there, and the little accumulation of light coloured sand disclosed stands out in head-line type to the trained eye of the tracker.

It is apparent that in the past—say two thousand years ago or, in some places, considerably less—the sand accumulations in Libya and the adjoining deserts were not so great as they are to-day. In Sinai for instance there is every reason to think the coastal belt was quite free from sand in the days of the Roman Empire, judging by the ease with which invading armies crossed this 150 mile stretch of desert, and it is fairly certain that as late as the end of the 18th century, when Napoleon attempted his march to Syria to cut off Europe from Asia, the dunes in his path were not nearly so difficult as they were 116 years later when Murray drove the Turks eastward. In this connection there are many legends of a lost but inhabited oasis in the Libyan Desert—Zarzura—and the reports of this were so insistent that many expeditions have set out in recent years to look for it. It may be taken for certain that the oasis does not exist at the present time, for almost every mile of this vast wilderness has been patrolled either by land or air, but it is probable that at one time there was such an oasis, which has filled up with drift sand during the last few centuries.

There is no certain method of controlling sand, but, though all the brain and work of modern engineering cannot shift a dune or deflect it in anyway once it has formed, it is comparatively easy to create one. I look back with pride mingled with other feelings when I think of some of the magnificent dunes I have created inadvertently where no dune grew before.

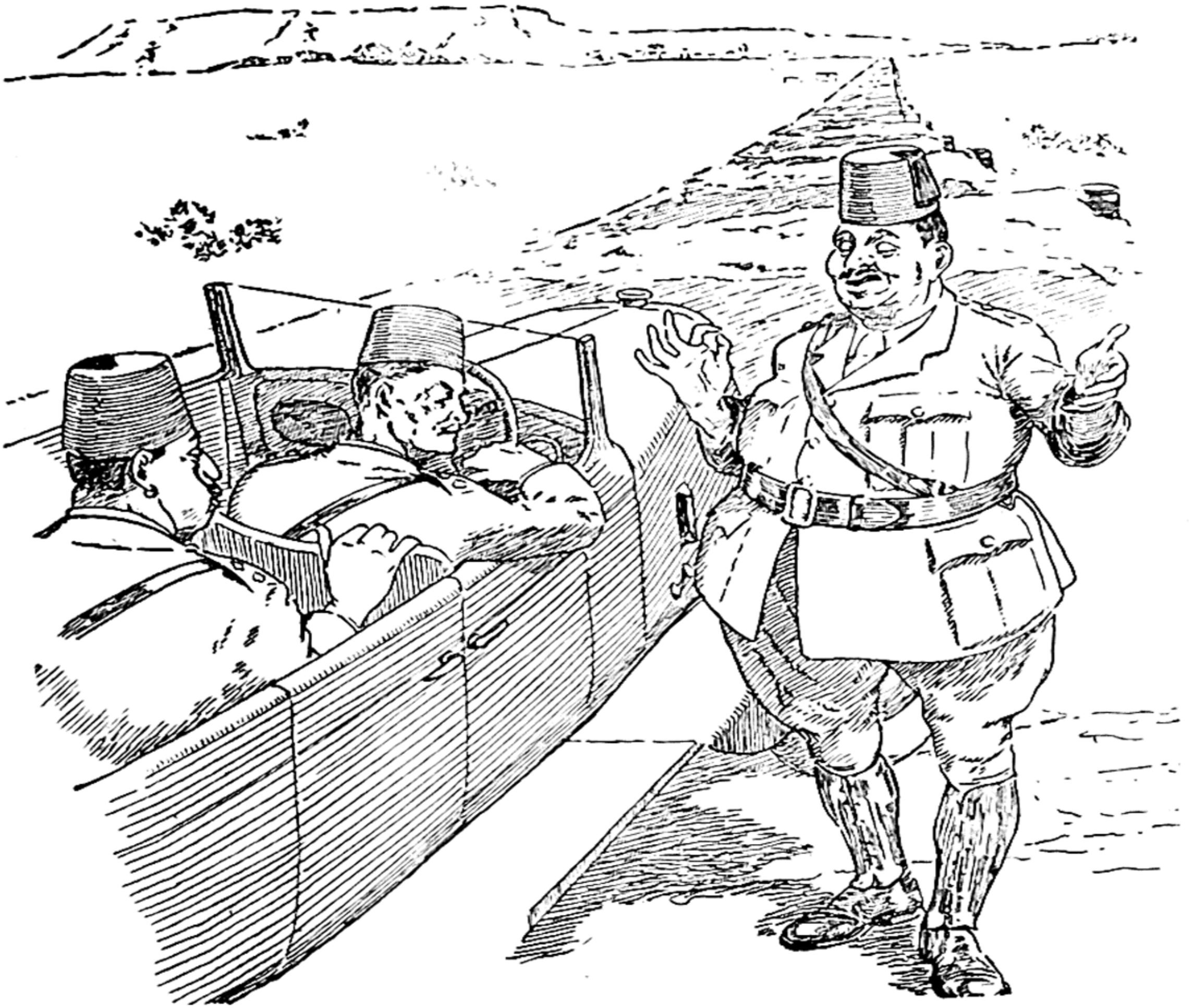
Once I made a desert garden close to the main motor road, and to protect the trees from drift sand I made a *gerid* (palm-branch) fence

round it. The fence attracted the sand which previously was not in evidence, and in one year there was a dune eight feet high and fifty yards long right across the motor road. This created a difficult dilemma, as if I pulled the fence down the sand would have gone into the garden engulfing the trees, and the only solution of the *impasse* was to construct another road some distance away, and this was an admission of defeat.

On another occasion when I made the first bitumen-surfaced road across Sinai, to advertise the work, show the way and generally shout 'hurrah-hurrah' in the desert, I placed the empty tar-barrels—for in Sinai the man does not call for the empties in a lorry—along the side of the road. They looked most inspiring in a long black line fading away into the distance through the shimmer of the mirages.

A week later I came down to admire my beautiful new road, and found it impassable. On the lee side of every barrel an embryo dune had formed, and, as these stretched right across the road in serried ranks, it was out of the question for all wheeled traffic. I had the offending barrels rolled away into *wadis* and hollows and in a week the road was clear again. This queer habit of sand is one that our forces in the Middle East might bear in mind, as by the erection of suitable collectors it would be possible to create lines of immature dunes in open country which would make a previously good bit of tank-going in front of our trenches into a giant's washboard, across which no vehicle could travel at speed and going over which no tank gunner could lay his gun.

There is evidence too that sand can be petty and spiteful as a long while ago a dune came strolling over a low range of mountains and settled down across the main Sinai-Palestine road. For years I fought that dune, keeping a more or less permanent gang at work shovelling away the drift sand after every dust storm, and, when things had reached the stage where some twelve feet of deposit had to be man-handled after a blow, I made the road over the dune on a foundation of brushwood and stone thus providing motorists with a most fascinating, if dangerous, switchback. This had the effect of annoying the sand dune seriously, and calling up all its reserves it built itself



*I came down to admire my beautiful new road, and
found it impassable.*

up another twenty feet and covered the switchback. After this I realised I had met my match and surrendered. I wrote a letter to Headquarters asking them for a special grant to make an alternative road and by-pass the dune. Headquarters wrote back refusing the money, and told me to shovel the offending sand away; a marked feature of Headquarters in all walks of British life is that they believe that everyone serving under them is an unimaginative nitwit with a complete blank in his brain so far as the obvious is concerned.

In the case of my dune Headquarters were brought to see reason in the end, and, as the track was a trans-continental one, some £300 was allowed and the by-pass on the windward side of the dune constructed. Immediately this was done the dune lost all zest in life as it had nothing left to live for. Every day it saw cars spin past to the north at 45 m.p.h. instead of wallowing axle deep in sand, and daily it shrank in size and looked more unhappy. In three short months it was reduced to nothing but a small mound of sand, until finally it disappeared altogether, leaving not a trace of its previous existence on the surface of the gravelly desert—one of the clearest cases of death from a broken heart I have met in my life. In one way, however, it won the last round, for every traveller who comes that way now exclaims: 'What on earth induced the idiot who made this road to construct that ridiculous and unnecessary curve?'

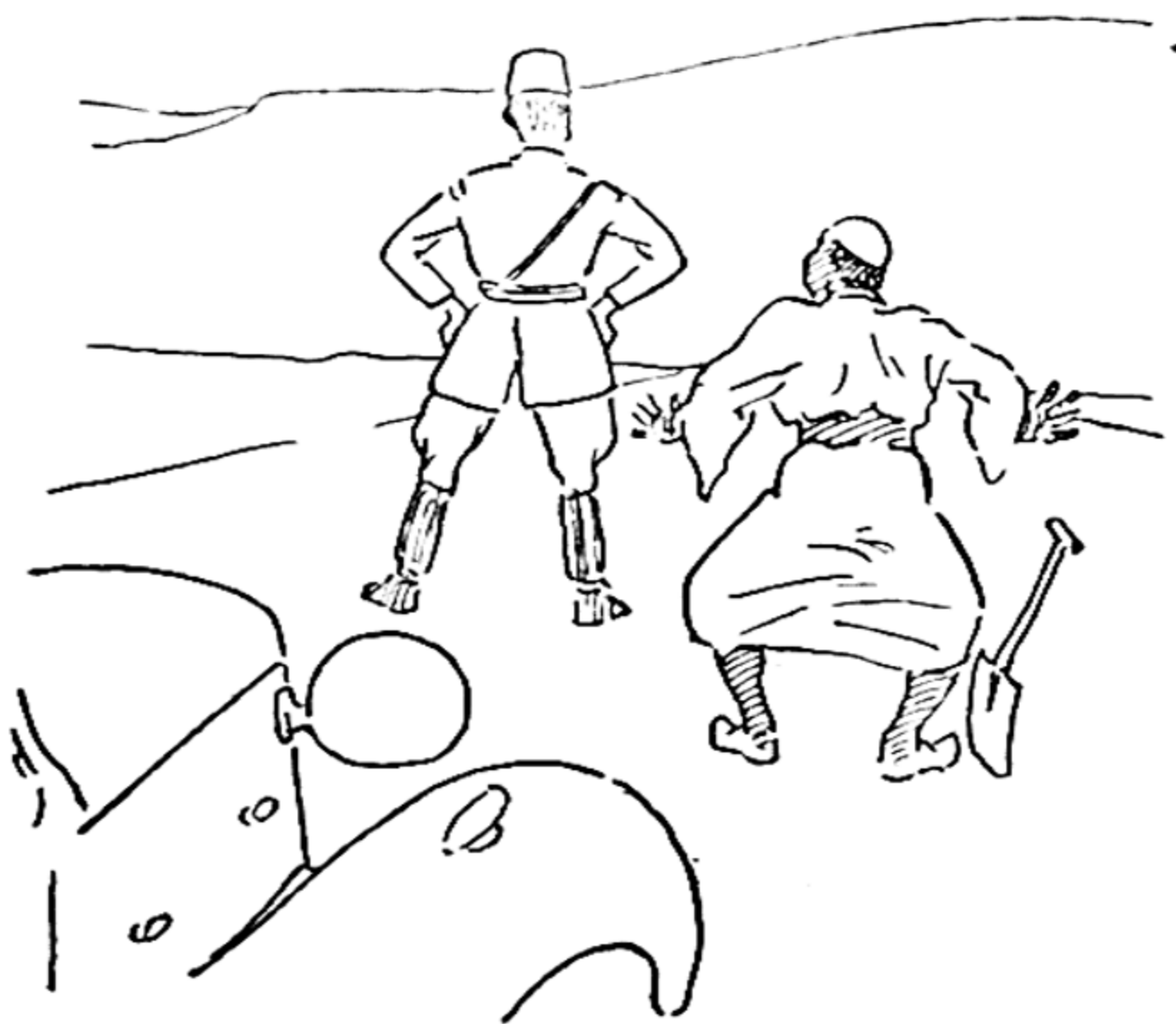
Throughout the length and breadth of the Middle East and its surrounding deserts young and untried railway and other engineers come out from the homeland full of self confidence and recently-acquired knowledge, and, on the threshold of their careers, come right up against a most aggressive dune threatening the length of line or area of which they are in charge.

'Why the blazes did my fat-headed inefficient predecessor allow this to happen?' they say, and then they get to work, and experimenting with a sand dune is like stirring up a lion with a red hot poker. I have a suspicion Shakespeare must have been playing about with one when he wrote those lines which run: 'makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others we know not of.' In almost every case the well-meant efforts of the young engineer result in creating

a gargantuan monster with satellites, which puts the railway line out of action until an alternate route is mapped out and constructed.

Apparently the only possible method of causing a sand dune or drift sand to halt is by the planting of soil binding grasses, but, as even the tough marram grass requires a modicum of moisture, the remedy is seldom one which can be employed successfully in the desert. The planting of trees such as figs or date palms creates a draught round the stems and this, in the parlance of the police when dealing with a street hawker and his barrow, causes the dune to move on. Like the hawker, however, the dune only moves on a little way and will be found about two hundred yards down the street causing a more serious obstruction than was the case formerly.

The worst thing one can do with sand is to erect a wooden or corrugated iron barrier to stop its advance into a road, railway line or garden. Sand has apparently an indolent nature, and it goes drifting across the desert looking for something against which to lean. To provide it with a barrier of this description is to present it with the very thing for which it has been hoping, and in seven days, frequently less, it has surmounted the barrier and is pouring over the top like a miniature Niagara. Experimenting with such barriers, however, has disclosed an arrangement which is a palliative rather than a cure; this is, if the corrugated iron fence is so constructed that there is a clear space below of some six inches, a strong draught is created which keeps the sand on the move for a distance of about ten yards, which is sufficient if one wishes



... told me to shovel the offending sand away

to protect a road or railway, but useless if the defence is erected to protect a garden or houses.

In the north of Sinai there is a small village consisting of two streets which, when then I knew it first in 1917, stood in an open plain by the wayside. Sand was then beginning to collect on the north side of the houses and, despite the planting of trees and the erection of innumerable barriers, it continued to accumulate until when I left the country in 1936 the road ran level with the roofs and, in some places, over them, and all the houses were subterranean. It was in this village that there lived a very old man who had seen Napoleon pass that way in 1799 on his march across the desert to Acre. The old gentleman therefore must have been about 140 years of age and in consequence his memory was not very reliable, as whenever he tried to give an account of the passing troops, he mentioned men wearing skirts and cavalry with ostrich plumes in their hats, with Napoleon at their head. He was of course jumping a century or more and talking about Murray's army on the heels of the retreating Turks.

The reports of ever-recurring sandstorms which hampered military operations in Libya caused people to wonder if they could be as bad as they sounded. The answer is in the affirmative, as with the constant movement of military traffic the sand and dust is more easily raised than in normal times. From the most important standpoint—that of the Royal Air Force—sandstorms are a most serious stumbling block, for even a mild breeze, which raises the sand only some three feet above the surface of the ground, constitutes a most dangerous situation, as a pilot endeavouring to land can see nothing but a yellow blur beneath, and there is nothing to tell him if the runway is sixty feet below him or only six.

As to lack of visibility I can only say I have been utterly lost in sandstorms on my own doorstep as it were. On one occasion my wife and I were returning by car from southern Sinai, driving up the road which runs beside the Gulf of Suez. At 12 midday the long journey was virtually over: to the north we could see the violet outline of Gebel Ataka over beyond Suez, and at its foot the clumps of

dark green trees and white stone buildings of Port Tewfik. I had just made the remark we should be in the Rest House at Port Tewfik in good time for a 'short one' before lunch when it happened. A puff of hot wind came from the south, which raised the sand and dust in venomous little spirals on either side of the track, and next minute with a roar it was upon us. In a flash the sea and the mountain disappeared in the yellow haze, but I managed to drive on for a mile very slowly by looking, not in front, but directly downwards from my seat and just picking out the tracks beneath me. Then this became impossible, for I could not see the surface of the road only three feet below me on account of the fiercely driven sand.

My Arab orderly got out of the car to ascertain if we were still on the road, and in a moment he was lost. Then the cook got out and, despite my anguished screams, for the last person one wishes to lose is one's cook, he disappeared into the blur and did not return. As I was only three miles from my destination in country I knew as well as the back of my hand, and, as there was no risk of being really lost for I had the sea to the west and impassable mountains to the east, I drove on resolved to get through somehow. It was a most unpleasant experience as we bumped into boulders, we crashed into bushes and we lurched into sudden *wadis*, and a wiser man would have been content to stay put. When eventually at 6 p.m.—rather late for lunch—the wind dropped, and with it the sand, I found I was nearly ten miles north of Suez heading up the east bank of the Canal for the Mediterranean.

With regard to the force of this wind-driven sand and its cutting powers I had a most painful experience when on an exploring expedition in the Libyan Desert with the late Prince Kamel el Din in 1923. I have told this story to several people and, as all of them have shown a marked if polite inability to believe me, I am beginning to doubt my own veracity and wonder if the story is really true. I was about sixty miles away from our main supply dump in horrible desert west of Dakhla Oasis when it came on to blow hard from the south, and, as this was a pure sandstorm owing to the nature of the desert and not a sand and dust storm combined, it was possible to see several

yards ahead. As I was running on a compass bearing and not on a track this was quite sufficient to enable me to travel at about 25 m.p.h.

The car was a patrol Model T. Ford without a windscreen, and so I put on a balaclava helmet and goggles to protect my face and eyes, and donned my gauntlets to cover my hands. I drove against the full force of that gale for four hours, finding it extremely difficult to see anything during the last hour. The reason for this was that my goggles, when I arrived eventually, were of that type of frosted glass one finds in lavatory windows, my leather gauntlets looked like soft chamois with the dark brown surface completely removed, whilst the radiator, bonnet and even the dull black front axle of the car were as highly burnished as if they were of chromium plated steel.

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III.-Lies—Oriental

Lie is perhaps a harsh word to use to describe some of the delightful and flowery, if untruthful, romances which come one's way east of Suez, for in the Orient there is such a wide variety of lies—so many intricate and subtle species of mendacity—that the commonplace straight-forward fib is, if anything, unusual in the Beduin world. There are age-old lies through which their forefathers saw ages ago, but in which they endeavour still to believe, and there are newly-invented ones up to the high standard of which a whole tentage will strive to live; there are individual lies told for an immediate personal gain, and cast-iron ones told by a whole tribe for tribal and communal advantage; there are lies told solely to please that are common the world over, but which are only brought to real perfection in the East; and lastly lies told by a whole variety of people for no apparent reason whatsoever.

On the other hand it is a debatable point whether our Occidental attitude, up to which it is doubtful if we live, of the 'truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God' fits in with every circumstance in life. The truth at times can be both disconcerting and painful, and perhaps the most unpleasant and dangerous form of

human life is the man or woman who persists in telling the plain unvarnished truth on every occasion, who prides himself or herself in so doing, and who says with unctuous piety when a first-class and quite unnecessary fracas has been started and a home broken-up in consequence; 'Well, anyway, it was the truth.' Once this high standard of veracity is detected as being endemic the possessor of it is shunned as a leper in all normal society.

It might be argued that I was unfortunate in coming in contact with such a cloud of mendacity as I did during my desert service, but there is an explanation and a very reasonable one. For the last five hundred years or more the Beduin has lived outside the law, and all his pursuits and pastimes, and even his normal life, seem to infringe in some way on the laws that govern, or try to govern, the area in which he lives. If he indulges in tribal raiding, which in his eyes holds much the same position as professional association football does in ours with points scored and lost and a position in the League table, he is committing murder and theft, which idiotic governments persist in regarding as crimes. If he shoots a gazelle or ibex for the pot, he has broken the shooting regulations, and those framed for the protection of wild life. If he grazes his animals over areas where his forefathers have had free run for generations, they damage the crops, which some interloping cultivator has grown with official sanction. If he cuts down trees for charcoal he is offending against the forestry laws, and if his frayed rope breaks and his goat-skin water bag falls down the well he is fined for defiling drinking water. He becomes imbued with the idea that everything he does is 'verboden', and therefore, when asked a direct question, he tells a lie, and, if this is not accepted, tells another. Frequently it is just an ordinary lie with daylight shining through it at every point, but sometimes it borders on the magnificent, becomes the envy of all men, and as time goes on is enlarged and embroidered until it grows into a romance and makes history.

One of the best examples of this was that which became known as Sinaitic Tobacco Plant Lie. This was remarkable because it was told not by one tribe only, but all the tribes and by everyone in any way

connected with them. It was one of those lies told so often that the raconteurs believed it themselves, and I fell into the habit of retailing it myself, repeating it without batting an eyelid to Excise and other officials, and never for one moment was my word doubted. One obtains an extraordinary feeling of rectitude when one tells a lie of this quality.

The story is connected with the growing of tobacco, which is one of the things a ridiculous government forbids a Beduin to do. The poor old Arab of the desert has not many amusements, but he is a confirmed pipe-smoker, and, being a desperately poor man, he cannot afford to buy tobacco, so grows his own. The sort of tobacco he grows is roughly what one would expect from a barren desert with a scanty rainfall, and is so rank and poisonous that an English tomato grower would hesitate to use it as a fumigant. Nevertheless the government is adamant; tobacco is tobacco, and the growing of it without an expensive licence is a most serious offence carrying with it a fine that would not only bankrupt the individual Arab, but the whole tribe as well.

As a confirmed smoker myself I confess all my sympathies were with the Beduin, but one unhappy day, early in my service as Governor, I was with a police patrol when we came over a rocky rise and found, secreted in a fertile hollow, an acre or more of thriving tobacco plants. It was a most unfortunate business altogether, as the owner, who was hoeing round the plants, was one of our sub-sheikhs, a man of position, and a very great friend of mine. I could not see how we were going to get out of it, for we had caught him red-handed, but I had under-estimated his powers. He came to meet me with out-stretched hand and a winning smile, and there was nothing to show that he was not delighted to see us.

'*Salaam aleikhum, ya Bey,*' he said. 'Your arrival is well-timed for I have just discovered this accursed tobacco growing and was about to destroy it. Now I will hand my mattock to your police who will root up every plant while your Excellency watches them.'

'Who does it belong to?' I asked.

The sheikh raised his eyes and hands to heaven whilst he scuffled



'It is Allah's work,' he said devoutly.

his feet in the earth to obliterate the plough marks on which he was standing.

'It is Allah's work,' he said devoutly. 'The seed of the tobacco is so small and light the wind blows it about the desert. Long years before we had the present good government the Bedawi were allowed to grow tobacco, but now wise laws prevent this. The seed from this blows all over the desert and now, where Allah wills it, it springs up after the rains, putting law-abiding sheikhs like myself to much inconvenience as I must perforce go forth and destroy the plants that grow against orders in the areas for which I am responsible.'

In those days I was completely ignorant of tobacco in any other form than that which one finds in cigarettes and in the tins of one's favourite smoking mixture, so I appealed to the *shawish* (sergeant) in charge of the patrol.

'Does tobacco grow in this fashion?'

'It has been known to,' said the *shawish* with a twinkle in his eye. 'I myself have seen tobacco growing in spots which the hand of man has not touched, but here there would seem to be the marks of a plough.'

'That is true,' said the sheikh; 'in this spot last summer I grew water melons, and you will recall, *ya shawish*, I gave you two of great sweetness when you passed my tent on patrol. The tobacco seeds took root here after the melons were removed.'

Of course there were still many factors that required further elucidation, one of which was that the hand of Allah had sown the tobacco in orderly rows with the correct spacing between plants and had obviously hoed round them afterwards to conserve the moisture, but the lie was too magnificent to be ignored, and to disbelieve it would constitute an insult to a most likeable and intelligent old gentleman. From this episode the Sinaitic Tobacco Lie took root, spread forth its branches throughout the land, and, provided the hand of Allah was not too obvious and restricted itself to horticultural efforts in well-secluded nooks where they would not be easily seen, all was well. The laws of the government were respected, in the

breach, if not in the observance, and the Beduin kept his pipe filled with his foul-smelling tobacco.

The next lie on my list is a more sordid one, but it was built up on a very well-prepared foundation of fool-proof mendacity, and should have been as impervious to all shocks and penetrations as is reinforced concrete if the remainder of the construction had been carried out on the same masterly lines. One of my junior Egyptian officers had been on a car patrol in pursuit of smugglers and the conclusion of it had conveniently brought him to the gay town of Port Said. The following day he came into my office.

‘You will agree, Sir,’ he said, ‘that Abdullah is one of the best car-drivers we have. He looks after his car well, he is most skilful driving in the desert when the going is bad, he is a man of good conduct and a splendid mechanic.’

I said I agreed with all this, but as there was not a vacancy for a corporal it was no use discussing promotion.

‘No, Sir,’ he replied, ‘it is not promotion. He has had bad luck. Yesterday, when he was carrying a most important message of mine about smugglers to the police officer in Port Said caracol, he ran into a telegraph pole and damaged his car. It was not his fault as an old woman got in his way, and being a kind-hearted man he ran into the telegraph pole instead of the old woman. He is willing to pay for the damage, but I beg of you, Sir, not to punish him as he is a very splendid driver and this was just bad luck.’

Abdullah came in then, admitted the damage and his willingness to pay for it, and, after a slight censure about the inadvisability of driving fast in crowded streets, the episode was closed—until pay day at the end of the month. I was then informed that Abdullah wished to speak to me.

‘I have drawn no pay at all this month, Effendim,’ he said.

I explained I was sorry about this, but I did not think he would draw any the next month, as the new radiator and front axle would absorb it all.

‘But this is hard on me, Effendim, as Mustapha Effendi now says he will not pay me as arranged.’

'What has Mustapha Effendi got to do with the repairs of your car?' I asked.

'He was driving it,' said Abdullah, 'and I was not there. He took it in the evening to go out with friends to a café on the shore, and when they were all coming back *sakran* (drunk) he drove it straight into a telegraph pole. He promised me if I would take the blame he would pay for the damage and give me £1 as well. Now he says he did not damage the car and knows nothing about it, neither will he pay me, and so I am now telling you the truth.'

The remarkable part about this episode is the mentality of a man who could conceive and work out so minutely a first-class piece of chicanery, complete in every detail and water-tight in every compartment, and then allow the whole structure to fall to the ground over a cheap bit of knavery that would inevitably ruin it. However, if everything could be explained by rule of thumb in the Orient the East would be shorn of much of its mystery and charm.

An example of the quite inexplicable was the Corpse in the Sand Dunes Lie. This was related in an airy insouciant manner with no ulterior object in view, and I was never certain if it was told to save trouble and keep everything nice and clean, or whether the teller of the story was an unobservant fool; and whatever the Beduin may be he is seldom unobservant.

I was in my office one day when an Arab strolled in, contemptuously ignoring the efforts of my orderlies to detain him as was their wont, and having discussed the weather and crops with me, casually mentioned that there was a dead body lying in the sand dunes near by. He made the announcement in much the same way as George Formby says 'It's turned out nice again'.

'Who is it—a Beduin or a villager?' I asked.

The Arab clicked his tongue to indicate he did not know and, moreover, conveyed the impression it was a matter of supreme unimportance and no affair of his. After a few more questions I asked if the man had been murdered, and there was another negative click of the tongue.

'Are there any signs of violence or foul play?'



He made the announcement in much the same way as George Formby says 'It's turned out nice again'.

'No, nothing,' was the reply. 'He just died—that's all.'

It sounded as if some stray wayfarer had been overcome by the heat and had died of heart failure, so I rang up the doctor to go to the spot with a police officer and do everything that was needful.

About an hour later my wife and I were driving past the place where the body had been found, and as the police were still there I thought I might as well go over and have a look at things generally. My wife protested that she did not want to see some awful murdered corpse.

'It's quite all right,' I said, 'he wasn't murdered but died quite naturally, and you won't see anything dreadful.'

As the car drew near the spot the police opened out to let us pass and there, lying a crumpled heap in a wide area of trampled blood-stained sand, was the most obviously murdered man the world has ever seen. He was a mass of wounds from head to foot, with one arm broken and his head a battered pulp, and in every respect he was quite the most grisly sight it has been my misfortune to witness. One thing it proclaimed in large advertisement type was 'here is murder most foul and a man done to death'.

It transpired eventually that he was an Arabian cattle dealer on his way back from Cairo after the sale of his beasts, who had been murdered by a Jewish refugee from Palestine, and, as there was not the slightest reason to suspect my Arab informant nor any member of his tribe, his nonchalant and wildly incorrect statement must remain forever another unexplained mystery.

As every Beduin Arab is an expert naturalist there is not the slightest excuse for a mistake over fauna or feather, for not only does he know every creature at a glance, but he can recognise the tracks they make and tell the age of the tracks. There were two of our animals in Sinai in which I was interested: one was the ibex, or mountain goat, and the other the Arabian type of the leopard which is very rare. The hunting of the ibex was a lengthy proceeding as I had to make a two days' journey by car to the south of the peninsula; it took from two to four days, scrambling over granite mountains before one located a decent head, and then all too frequently an erring puff of wind, a falling stone, or a half-stifled cough would send the beast scurrying to another far-distant mountain range; whilst sometimes I just missed my shot!

I complained so often of the difficulties and the distance I had to travel that my Beduin friends out of sheer kindness of heart invented a herd of ibex for me, put in charge of it an old male with a magnificent head, and located it on an easily-climbed little hill, a few miles away from my most comfortable rest-house. A neighbouring deep *wadi* (gorge) was the spot where they came down to graze on the white flowers of the *rutm* (desert broom), whilst a water-hole in the rocks was the place where they drank. Everything in fact was ideal and I had not the slightest complaint to make beyond the fact that there were no ibex and never had been, but this did not transpire until I had spent over half a dozen dawns waiting for the wild goats which never appeared.

As they had managed only to give half-satisfaction over the ibex they decided apparently to do better over the leopard, and one day a family of mountain Beduin brought in a tiny cub which was so newly-born that its eyes were still closed and all it could do was to

mew feebly. This, they stated, was the cub of a big leopardess—a most dangerous animal—and they recounted a story of how daring members of the tribe had faced the animal in her den; how they had attacked her with swords only, for, of course, owing to government regulations they were not allowed rifles for protection from wild beasts (a nasty backhander this); and how the bravest man in the tribe had then dashed into the hole in the rocks and extracted the finest of the cubs for *Saahtak's* lady. This sounded almost too good to be true; and it was, for after my wife had spent a month of her time bringing up the poor little cub on a baby's bottle it grew, not into a lordly leopard, but into a very common or garden fox!

Then there was the Turkish Mountain Road Myth. One can hardly call this a lie as it bordered on pure romance shot with mystery; it was told for the sake of the telling by everyone in a position to know it was absolutely untrue; and there was apparently no reason for it. It occurred not very long after the last war when we were improving road communications, not only in Sinai, but also those which connected the peninsula with its immediate neighbours, Palestine and Trans-Jordan. Palestine was comparatively simple as the invading Turks had obligingly left behind them the foundations of a metalled highway that ran direct to Beersheba, and which is the basis of the military road to-day, but Trans-Jordan was more difficult. Apparently the only possible route was that which runs across the head of the Gulf of Akaba and up the Wadi Ithm to Maan, and this meant travelling round three sides of a square to reach our objective which was Amman, the capital of the State.

Then one of my Arab policemen said he had heard the Turks used a road that ran direct from Maan, through the mountains of Moab south of Petra, and across the deep Wadi Araba to Kuntilla in Sinai, and as this would lead to the cutting out of some 80 to 100 miles it was worth considering. I did not know the country east of the Wadi Araba, but the map showed it to be most mountainous with ranges running up to 6,000 feet and, as there were no signs of the road or even wheel-tracks on the Sinai side, I thought the story sounded most unlikely.

However, I sent for several Arabs from the locality and made enquiries. Yes, there was no doubt about it—the road existed, and had been used extensively by the Turks during the war. Eye-witnesses had seen carts and long lines of lorries moving down it, whilst one man remembered seeing a high-up German general in a staff car pass through at the head of a large army *wa mudafah kobar kamman* (and also big cannons), which seemed to settle it.

I wrote to Peake Pasha, who in those days commanded the Trans-Jordan Arab Legion, and he replied that he did not think there was any truth in the story of the road, but strange to say all his Arabs told the same yarn. One of his eye-witnesses in fact outclassed mine, for he had seen T. E. Lawrence himself pass up it in pursuit of the Turks.

The next thing to do was to locate the old road and inspect it with a view to repair, and as this meant an international patrol, as it were, with police and cars from both countries, permission had to be obtained from higher authority. Eventually the small exploring force was got together and complete with a variety of guides and eye-witnesses we set forth, and after travelling over really frightful country arrived at the foot of a range of precipitous mountains. Into these wound a narrow gorge, strewn with giant boulders and practically impassable by reason of rocky outcrops, and this according to the guides was the high road used by the Turks! There was not a sign of a car track, nor had any recent attempt been made to clear the way, and apparently the road had not been used for traffic since the days of the Nabateans round about 500 B.C.

The guides when this was pointed out to them were in no way shaken, and glibly explained it away by stating that the floods in winter had swept down the valley, removing all marks. So we went slowly on with the gorge getting rougher and rougher, and narrower and narrower, until finally we were stopped altogether by a water-worn precipice some fifty feet high, beyond which the mountains ran up sheer to some 5,000 feet.

We turned accusingly to the guides, pointing to the precipice, and asked them what about it, but it did not knock a feather out of them.

This thing, they explained, of course, put the road out of question, and they were sorry it had happened, but they did not know about it. It doubtably the Turks had used this road, and the mass of rock which now blocked it had fallen recently: *vimkin minmudit wahed jumaa buss* (perhaps only a week ago), and to anyone who had only the barest rudiments of geology it was obvious the precipice had been in existence since the great Dead Sea rift split through the earth's surface a million—possibly two million—years ago!

A lie of these dimensions of course baffles all possible explanation, and to attempt to elucidate it would have been to spoil it. We decided the only thing to do was to regard it as a good Beduin jest, and after a while they began to see it in the same light themselves. We heard them roaring with laughter over it round the camp fire that night—a sort of delayed action joke—but what their original idea was we never discovered and never shall now.

No article on lies would be complete without a fisherman's fairy story, though as a fisherman myself I do not agree that as a class we are a fraternity of liars given to telling tales of our own skill and the wondrous fish we have caught by reason of it.

I had many old friends among the fishermen of the Sinaitic shores, and the greatest of these was Radwan, a philosopher, a great sportsman and a born raconteur. I have told many stories of Radwan, including the famous one of the Akaban whale which swallowed a Beduin Jonah, who remained in his belly for three days and three nights until he remembered his sheath knife and carved his way out to safety.

The story, which I should hesitate to call a lie, concerns a great shark that is reputed to visit Akaban waters every three months or so. There are of course any number of sharks in the Gulf of Akaba, but none of them appears to be much over nine feet in length, and this particular specimen—a confirmed man-eater—was according to Radwan a matter of twenty feet or more, and he comes up on an exploratory cruise from the Red Sea whenever he thinks people have forgotten all about him.

The first time I went out fishing with Radwan was in the very

early days of his successful career as a ghillie, when all he possessed in the way of a boat was a most frail and crafty home-made dug-out. We set forth in this to troll for barracouta, and when we were about half a mile from the shore the triangular dorsal fin of a shark broke the water quite close to us. It was a dirty beige colour, and looked both unpleasant and menacing, and though I do not know enough about sharks to estimate their sizes from their fins, I should have put him at well up to the twenty foot mark and good for a man-eating job. The fin continued to circle round us, and when I called Radwan's attention to it he told me a long sad story of the previous owner of the boat, who had died mysteriously and suddenly. He seemed loath to tell me the exact details of his death, and I had to drag from him the admission that this particular shark had taken him, having previously upset the boat. After this disclosure I seemed to lose all desire to fish, and at my request we went ashore rather hurriedly, leaving the shark to circle in our wake.

I do not know if Radwan had got tired of paddling his canoe and wished to get ashore for his afternoon's siesta, or whether the story of the shark was true. I repeated it to one of his friends—or rather his business partner, which is not quite the same thing—and he laughed the story to scorn as being absolutely false. Such a shark had never existed, and Radwan had acquired the boat in very peculiar circumstances, into which the local police had made enquiries at the time; but all this proved nothing, for it was only one man's word against another's, and either might have been telling the truth—or not.

I was reminded of all this not long ago when I read a recently published book, *Once in Sinai* by J. M. C. Plowden, in which the authoress tells a most dramatic tale of a night's fishing off Akaba in a boat with Radwan and two Trans-Jordan officers. They had sailed out to their anchorage and, shortly after the fishing started, the big fin of the shark broke the water as it had with me, and began to circle round the boat drawing closer and closer. They had forgotten to bring any oars in the boat—and this puts the stamp of truth on the story, for I can think of nothing more likely to occur in a Beduin boat

manned by a race who loathes the hard labour of rowing, and who would rather wait two days for a breeze than take to the oars for a couple of hours. They were therefore unable to get to the shore, and for several hours they kept off the shark by throwing the bait for him to pick up and splashing the water, until at last a providential breeze sprang up and they hoisted sail. The Trans-Jordan officers, according to Mrs. Plowden, were scared stiff, and believed implicitly the story that this particular shark attacked boats and ate the occupants, so possibly I am doing Radwan an injustice by including this story under such an uncompromising title.

One of the few economical advantages of Sinai was that one never had to buy pumice stone for the lavatory basins, as water-worn pieces of suitable sizes could always be picked up along the shore. I recall that when the present Ambassador to Egypt, Lord Killearn, came to stay with me in El Arish, his younger daughter, then aged ten, collected a sack of it, and when her governess protested against this bulky addition to the luggage the Hon. Margaret Lampson explained that she thought it unlikely she would ever again be in a spot where pumice stone could be obtained for nothing and had therefore laid in a stock to last her lifetime.

I imagine that the stone throughout the ages had been washed up from the Greek volcano in Santorin, but had no idea that it existed in marketable quantities until suddenly a crop of land cases sprang up concerning the ownership of about twenty miles of sandy useless foreshore no one had ever bothered about previously. So far as I could make out almost everyone in Sinai, from the villagers in El Arish to the Beduin tribes in the apex of the peninsula, put in claims for various portions, producing age-old *hogas* (deeds) which were really age-old, and still more venerable-looking ones that had been made the night before by the village scribes. The cases that ensued were puzzling to a degree as no measurements were given except occasionally the *khutwa* (arm's length from the elbow), and this in the Arab world is rather more in the nature of a stretch of the imagination than an actual dimension; whilst the boundaries were vaguely indicated by such terms as 'north the sea, east the sand, south the

desert, and west sand with scrub bushes'. The legal experts hearing the cases found their difficulties increased by the fact that the Arishy people have their own private compass points, and north, east, south and south-west are all crowded between 0 and 135 degrees into the right hand third of the circumference whilst west, admitting of no compromise, occupies the remaining two-thirds.

The extraordinary part about the whole business was that no one in authority had any idea what had caused this sudden land boom on the barren shore. The various claimants gave a variety of reasons, all of them entirely divorced from the truth. Mohammed wanted it because he was looking forward to a good quail-netting season; Ahmed desired another piece because he wanted to build a hut for his family; Daoud (David) and Suliman (Solomon), his partner, required a good stretch of foreshore for drying and mending their fishing nets; whilst Abdel Salam had horticultural ideas and wished to make a garden in the very salt sand. Then, one day, when the confusion was at its height and the miasma of mendacity at its murkiest, a rather stupid witness in court inadvertently dropped the words 'pumice stone', and when everyone present rose as one man in righteous indignation and called him an unprincipled liar, we knew he was telling the truth.

This was confirmed the following day when a Jewish business man from Tel Aviv called to see me about making a contract for the supply of pumice stone his firm required for the construction of light roofing blocks.

'There are very extensive deposits of it all along the shore,' he explained, 'and I estimate there is sufficient for all my requirements for many years to come. The trouble is I cannot find out who the land belongs to and with whom I should make a contract. I must have seen at least a hundred claimants to the land, and, I hope you won't mind me saying so, but not one of them appears to have told me the truth.'

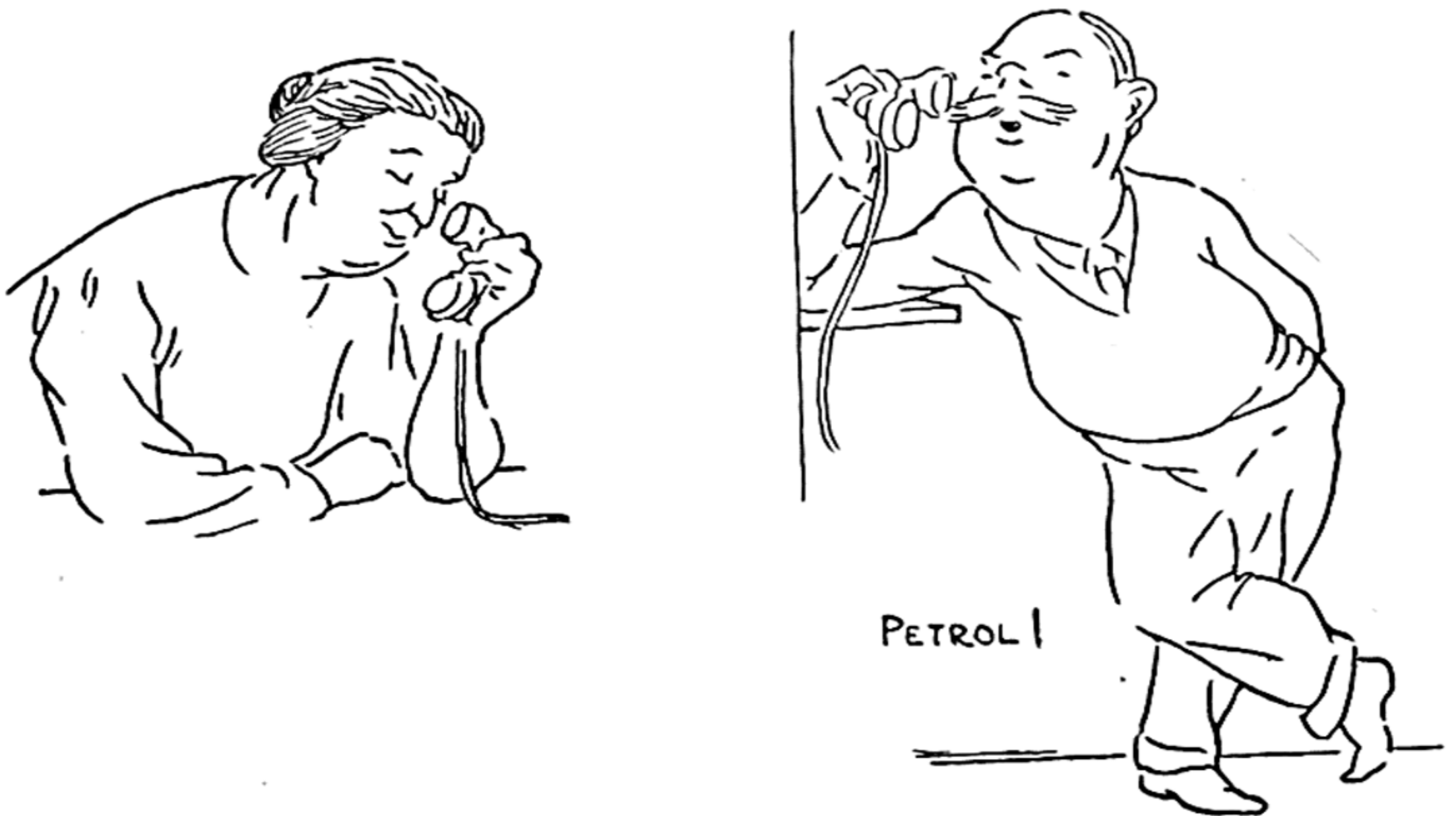
The only reply I could think of to suit the case was the popular Americanism 'You're telling me'.



IV.-Lies—Occidental

In the previous chapter the various lies of the Orient were grouped together under an impressive heading, but when one comes to deal with one's own countrymen's mendacity the list is not nearly so imposing and the varieties are limited.

There is first of all the little polite excuse, or white lie, which one gives for refusing an invitation and which is so easy to think of when writing a letter, but so hard to come by when it is a question of a verbal answer or one delivered over the telephone. Personally I find it far more difficult to lie convincingly into the unresponsive black mouthpiece of the telephone than when I am looking at my auditor with the light of candour shining in my eyes, and, judging from the the confused stammering I hear on the telephone when I am extending the invitation, I gather that most people experience the same trouble. This form of lie, however, is becoming obsolete for all one has to do now is to murmur the word 'petrol', and nothing more need be said. When the war is over, and petrol obtainable again, we shall find we are all very much out of practice.

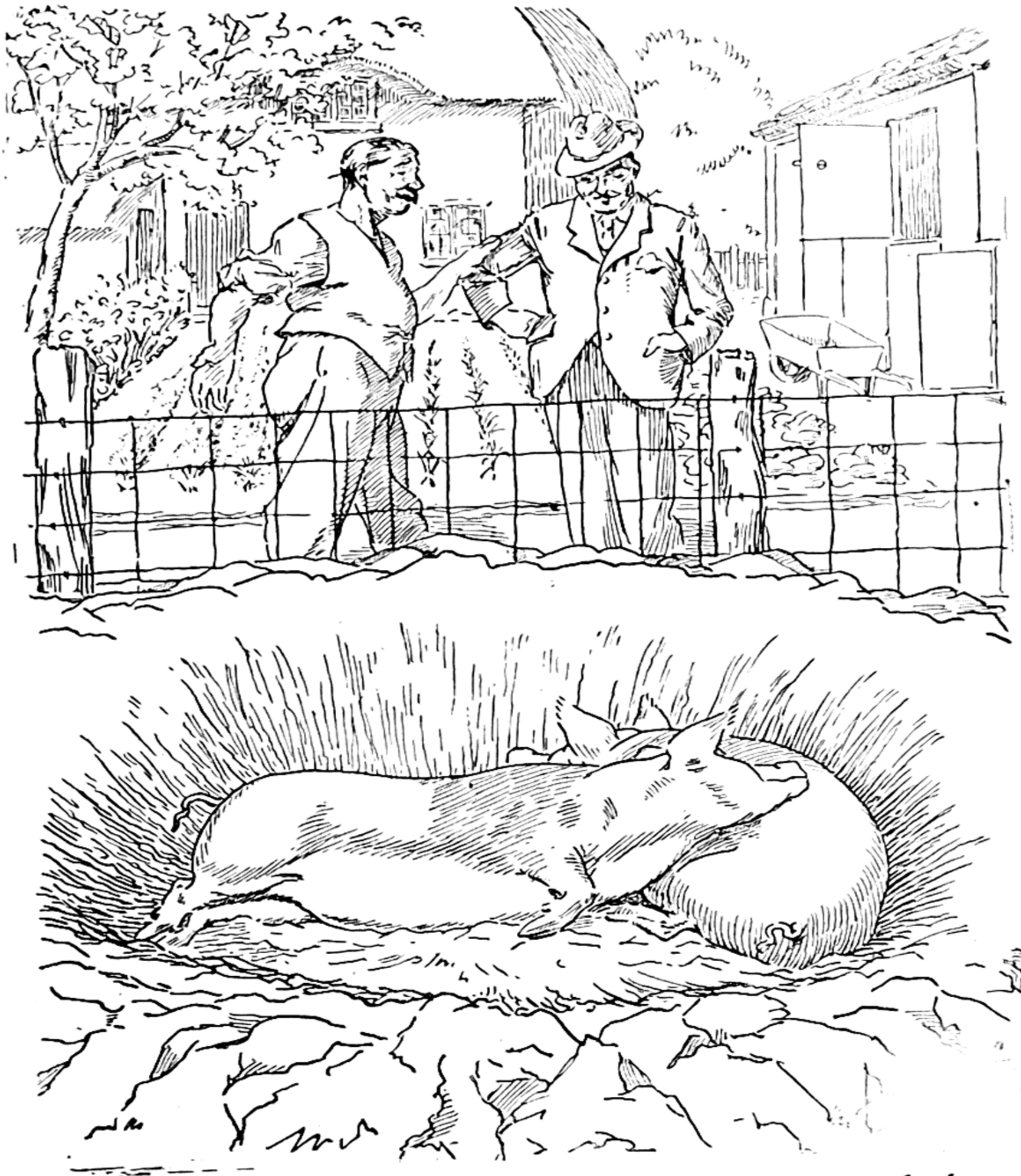


The little polite excuse, or white lie, which one gives for refusing an invitation.

Then there is the man who is a wanton liar about his own achievements, and is what we used to call years ago a 'bukkstick', but the type is not so plentiful to-day as it was some forty or fifty years ago. The days of boasting of one's prowess on the battlefield, or with rod, gun or cricket bat would appear to be over, and the reason for this may be that ever-recurring wars and the great improvement of communications generally make it more than likely that the liar may be faced with the prospect of demonstrating his courage and skill to his auditors.

On the other hand the war has provided a wonderful opportunity for the exaggerator and the expander of bad tidings, and we meet them almost every day. It is difficult to account for a mentality which indulges in this sort of thing, but it is probably due to ingrowing conceit and a desire to achieve temporary publicity at any cost. The type, however, is all too common, and when the first bombing of Great Britain started in real earnest in the autumn of 1940 there was after every raid a large number of explosives and incendiaries dropped on the countryside by German pilots, who had funked the issue and were going back to the homeland without facing the A.A. fire around Birmingham, Bristol, Coventry, or wherever happened to be the target for the night. The part of the world in which I live happens to be on the main route for 'planes bombing the western Midlands, and so after a big raid we were well plastered when the bombers flown by the cold-footed started unloading on the way home. As might be expected some ninety-nine per cent. of these fell in open fields, marshland and woodland and did no damage whatsoever. In fact, I am most grateful to the Teutonic gentleman, who dropped a real beauty in outsize bombs in the middle of a most unproductive bit of marshy heather-land, and created thereby a comfortable little duck preserve on which I have had many mallard and teal and an occasional snipe.

So far as I could see everyone felt frustrated when, after a series of crumps every night, there was nothing to report in the way of damage the following day, and then one morning the news spread that a small post-office at a local cross-roads had been blown up. As



*I saw an ear twitch, and discovered that the pigs were not dead
but sleeping.*

this was in my Home Guard area I had to inquire into it, and several reputed eye-witnesses, residing in the town near by, stated that not one brick was left standing and that the postmaster complete with family had been blown to pieces. As I drew near the scene the damage to the post-office grew less and less; the postmaster was still breathing, but would not last long; and the family were only injured and might recover. Then finally the postmaster and his wife and children were removed from the casualty list altogether, and replaced by two pigs. When eventually I arrived at the scene, after hearing all the evidence on the way, I discovered the post-office was absolutely intact except for a cracked lavatory window and one tile off; the postmaster was very much alive and selling health insurance stamps in a very peevish frame of mind; his wife, also peevish, was banging doors about the house; but fifty yards away in the orchard there was a small crater and in the crater lay the exhibits of German frightfulness, the bodies of two small Wessex Saddlebacks. As with tears in my eyes I grieved over this untimely loss of bacon and pork I saw an ear twitch, and discovered that the pigs were not dead but sleeping. They had found the bomb crater constituted a most sheltered and soft nook for the afternoon siesta.

In the Orient, as I explained, there is the magnificent mass lie, which is told by whole tribes or communities and told so often that everyone comes to believe it in the long run. In Great Britain we have something of the same sort of thing, but there is a difference. In the East the lie is told to hoodwink the forces of law and order, customs and revenue officials and the government generally, but in this country this form of mendacity is indulged in solely to deceive ourselves. There are certain good old hypocrisies which our forefathers started way back in the 18th century, the veracity of which in our innermost soul, we doubt, but which we continue to relate and embroider upon in conversation; on a larger and more public scale at luncheons, dinners and banquets; and for all to read in the press, on the principle that by repeating them often enough we shall still our consciences and convince ourselves that we are right—rather in the manner of the chameleon who blows himself up with his

own hot air from his lungs, or the tropical balloon-fish who does the same with water.

There are quite a number of these little self-deceits or humbugs, —lies is perhaps too harsh a word—such as the oft-repeated ‘hunting is the finest possible training for war’, which was used as justification for about three days’ leave a week from military duties, the maintenance at public expense of two chargers per officer for cavalry units after they had been mechanised, and the selection of men with a good hunting record for higher command. This little belief was based probably upon a good foundation of truth in the Napoleonic wars where shock tactics won battles, received something of a setback in the Crimea, and was utterly discredited in the war of 1914-18; but, despite all these things, and the fact that our German enemies can produce very good armies without the employment of hunting as a training medium, we cling to the old belief as a drowning man clings to a lifebelt. When the war is won and over there will arise phoenix-like from the wreckage of burnt-out tanks vociferous advocates, who will say it was won by hunting men led by Masters of Hounds, and will bring evidence to prove it.

It is over the question of cruelty to birds, beasts and fishes, however, that our natural mendacity and hypocrisy gets the fullest play, and the really honest people are those somewhat ruthless persons who refuse to recognise cruelty in any form, and the anti-blood-sport cranks who are out and out vegetarians. However much we may deplore both types, they are at least true to their convictions and do draw a hard and fast line, whereas the rest of us, you and I, and the man in the corner of the railway carriage, draw a very wobbly one suggestive of the outline of a jigsaw piece. There are a variety of reasons for this, one of which is that as a nation we find most of our ideas and opinions are ready made for us, either bought ‘off the peg’ or handed down from father to son, so that seldom we attempt to figure out a knotty problem for ourselves. Individually we have a taste for certain blood sports, and these blood sports are therefore excluded from the argument and all discussion is banned. It is regarded as unneighbourly and unmannerly to raise the topic at all.

We start off therefore to draw a straight line between cruelty and non-cruelty, and as grouse shooting is necessary and humane all is well. Then comes partridge shooting, and again all is well, and there is no difficulty about maintaining the straight line. Artificially raised pheasants, with the additional complication of bad shots who hit too far back, is not so easy, so here the line wobbles a bit to exclude cruelty. Then we come to fox hunting, and, as the fox is vermin and a very bloody murderer himself, there is no trouble here. When we arrive at stag hunting, harriers and beagles it is not easy at all, and so we ignore the question of cruelty altogether and concentrate on justifying the sports. We are extremely good at this, and there is a long list of clichés which every hunting man and beagler has learnt by heart, and which he can rattle off with the same facility as the Lord's Prayer, and, in some regrettable cases, with even more facility. The stock arguments, or humbugs, are so very well known that it is hardly worth while recording them, but some of the best are that hunting enables the farmer to sell his hay and corn which otherwise would be left on his hands, it creates employment, it keeps money in the country, for if certain people could not hunt they would go to the Riviera, and it is excellent training for war. The fine old argument that the quarry enjoys it as much as hounds and the field has now unfortunately been laughed out of credence, and the people who mention this go into the same category as those who believe the world is flat and that the Germans are really a nice kindly nation at heart.

We condemn badger digging, because no one cares much about standing round a huge excavation for some ten hours on a chilly day, and besides most of us like Brock. When we come to hunting the carted deer, however, we realise we are in a nasty predicament, for it is so difficult for a supposedly humane nation to justify the keeping of a very timid animal like a deer solely for the purpose of hunting it across country with hounds. We do wish a small community would not indulge in this unhappy form of relaxation as we have to countenance it, and get over it or round it in some way, because the various societies concerned with cruelty to animals obtain large sub-

scriptions from hunting people which, if one happened to have a nasty mind, one might regard as hush money. The attitude is that these subscriptions will be maintained provided no move is made by the society against any form of hunting, and, though the carted deer is regarded by most of these hunting subscribers as deplorable, it must not be interfered with, as any legislation against this particular pastime—we will not call it a sport—might very possibly become the thin end of the wedge inserted against hunting generally.

A few years ago a local inspector of cruelty to animals brought an action against a master and huntsman of a certain pack of buckhounds over the question of a stag which was hunted across a whole county, driven into the sea and rescued finally by fishermen. One hates to think that in this country secret wires pull the wheels of justice from their straight and narrow path, but when the case came up in court it was immediately adjourned. It was heard later when the publicity aroused had died down, and on this occasion the society, to which the inspector belonged, more or less repudiated his reliability and credibility as a witness and the case was dismissed.

We make up for our luke-warm attitude over the carted deer by the vigour with which we attack bull-fighting, and we can let ourselves go over this for it is the sport of another nation. With the exception of Sir Wilfred Blount there is no record of any Englishman taking part in it, and therefore the only corns we shall tread upon are Spanish ones. We will not listen to any justification by the Spaniards that bull-fighting is good for trade, that some farmers live by breeding bulls whilst others provide hay and corn for them, and that it keeps Spaniards in the country who otherwise might spend their money abroad, as that is just making excuses for a fiendishly cruel sport, and we advocate international interference to prohibit it.

Then there is the question of quails, and this is very trying. Quails are caught all along the northern coast of Africa in big trammel nets during the autumn migration. They are then shipped alive in crates, packed tight as sardines, to this country where they are fattened up for the table. The mortality during the voyage is of course enormous, but, as the poor little fellows cost only about 2½d. in Egypt and fetch

round about the 5s. mark in England, there is a nice margin. A cruelty-to-birds organisation wrote to me, as Governor of Sinai, urging that I should take steps to prohibit the catching of these quails. I replied that the Beduin did not catch the birds for sport as we—a more enlightened nation—would do, but solely because there was a market for them which enabled them, a desperately poor people, to make both ends meet. I said it was unreasonable I should prohibit a source of Arab income when my own countrymen were creating the demand, and the simplest solution would be for the bird society to get a bill passed prohibiting absolutely the import of live quail into Great Britain. To this they replied that ‘a very rich body of traders would be against us in which case we shall be beaten and the quail will end by getting no protection at all’. I must confess I do not quite understand all this, but it reads to me as if a majority of the six hundred odd Members of Parliament, elected by the free vote of an intelligent and humane democracy, could be induced to suppress their natural feelings concerning cruelty at the instigation of a ‘very rich body of traders’, and would throw out a bill prohibiting the import of live quail. Well, well, well! I am quoting the letter as I received it, but I do wish the secretary had not used the words ‘very rich’ as it has such an oriental flavour about it. In the end the poor little quail were protected in the breeding season only during which very few are caught, and the birds are of course unfit for the table. Otherwise the distasteful trade proceeds as before, or did so until the war started. There is a very nice point in this which one might miss: the quail bill as passed by our Parliament in 1937 is designed solely to protect the bird during its breeding season so that it may continue to propagate its species for the benefit of mankind. The question of the gross cruelty in packing it like sardines into a crate and transporting it to the British Isles does not arise!

Over another bird, however, we are quite wholehearted, and thus make up for any backsliding over quail. I refer to our condemnation of cock-fighting, and the lengths to which we will go to stamp it out. Shortly before the war started a society employed an *agent provocateur* at £800 a year, who went up to a northern county and encour-

aged the local people to revive cock-fighting; and such was his charm of manner and persuasiveness that eventually they staged a 'main' for him, and were immediately afterwards prosecuted, with their old cocking friend and instigator as chief witness for the prosecution. If such methods are adopted and *agents provocateurs* of this type employed there should be no limit to the number of forgotten blood sports which might be revived for the benefit of the police, and possibly even a Spanish bullfight might be staged if the funds supplied to the agent were sufficient.

There may be all sorts of arguments against cock-fighting—that it is degrading and bestial to watch two birds battering each other, and accusations of a similar nature—but our national contention is that it is gross cruelty, and it is submitted that, if the matter is studied from the point of view of cruelty only, then the great majority of our legal sports are infinitively more cruel. There are two forms of cruelty whether it be towards humans, animals or birds, and they are terror caused and agony inflicted. A good many of us to-day have experienced both, and all will agree that terror is worse than acute pain. Yet in a cock-fight, brutal as it is, the question of fear never arises for the birds are not forced to fight. They are burning to get at each other, and for hours from their crates have been yelling challenges. If by any chance a cock should display fear when taken from his crate the last thing his owner would do would be to put him in the ring against his will. He would not be studying the bird's feelings perhaps, but only the loss of his stake, as fighting a cock with no heart in the cause would be asking for defeat. Therefore if a bird should show signs of being a conscientious objector his views are respected, and he goes straight back into his crate.

The fact remains that nature for some reasons known only to herself has designed the game cock for one purpose only—fighting. He is built for it and equipped for it, and he thinks of nothing else. He starts fighting with his brothers in the clutch at the early age of six weeks; another and more bloodthirsty series of eliminating contests takes place at five or six months; and, when on reaching maturity he is penned with his hens, he never settles down to scratching in

the grass for their benefit, but spends his time shouting challenges to every male bird in the vicinity and endeavouring to get over the wire of his pen to kill, or be killed by his neighbour.

It is a quite common occurrence for a cock to fly over the top of his enclosure and walk a quarter of a mile to engage in a fight to the death. There has been no case on record of a fox or stag lurking in the vicinity of kennels in keen anticipation of a hunt, nor of a hare coming down off the fallows to meet coursing greyhounds or beagles. People, who execrate cock-fighting above all other blood sports, may take it therefore that the question of terror does not arise. When one sees a fox in the last stages of a hunt with his brush trailing in the mud and his eyes starting from his head, or hears the shrill shriek of a hare as the greyhound grips her quarters one has a suspicion that terror figures here.

With regard to pain inflicted one can only say it is not obvious, and the cock when fighting shews no signs of feeling the wounds he receives. This brings one to the question of the steel spur, which has caused cock-fighting to be execrated and there is something extremely repugnant in the idea of putting a metal spike on a bird to enable it to kill its opponent. Cock-fighters, however, in defence of the steel heel state that it is really humane as it ends a fight quickly and that, as gamecocks will seldom if ever admit defeat, they will go on battering each other until both birds are so damaged as to be useless for any future life. As it is one bird is killed quickly (as the fox, hare or otter is killed by hounds), and the winner goes into retirement to propagate his species. The idea of the old veteran gamecock, who has fought fifty successful fights, is quite fallacious as a bird makes usually only two or three appearances in the ring and, having proved he is up to game standard, is used for stud purposes.

Years ago I used to keep some pens of the Blue Dun Game for their hackle feathers, which are invaluable for trout flies, and Hardy Bros. and all the big tackle makers would be hard put to it if the strain were allowed to die out. Occasionally through carelessness a cock from one pen would find its way into that of another, and a terrible fight would take place when no one was present to interfere.

On these occasions, when birds had fought for some three or four hours until separated, both cocks were usually so badly wounded as to be of no further value, and the most humane thing to do was to wring their necks. I mention this to prove that the cock-fighters defence of the steel spur is on sound grounds.

The last point against cock-fighting is that it is brutal and degrading to allow birds to fight for the amusement of a crowd, and of course there is very sound argument here. But we ought to be consistent, and almost every night in the United Kingdom men battle together over six, ten and twenty rounds, and death and permanent disablement from glove fights are by no means unknown. It will be argued that these are legal glove fights, that men cannot hurt each other seriously, and there is no brutality, but the following is an extract from a B.B.C. commentary on a fight between Phillips and Foord on the night of the 21st June, 1938:—

‘He’s hitting him on that cut lip again and again and again. You can see the blood spurt every time a punch lands. He’s losing a considerable amount of blood—he’s blowing it out in a cloud. He must be swallowing a lot which is doing him no good. Ah! that’s opened up his nose again—he’s bleeding heavily now. Phillips’ eye is opened up. I see red showing. There’s a bad swelling on his eye. Ah! that’s got him on the nose once more—he must be losing pints of blood. He’s down—he’s down! He’s making great efforts to get up, but can’t. He seems to be in great pain. He’s making the most extraordinary contortions—I never saw anything like it. He’s got his right leg up and has moved four feet, but he’s evidently badly hurt and in great pain. No, he can’t do it—the count’s gone. He’s out!’

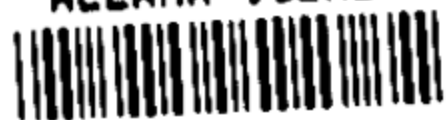
Well, I ask you?

It must not be thought from all this that I am in favour of cock-fighting and consider it should be allowed. I agree that it is bestial and that to allow birds or animals to fight for the amusement of a crowd is entirely repugnant, but if we are going to get so hot and bothered over cock-fighting, condemning it in the press and spending a year’s income to obtain a conviction, we might as well, when we are feeling so righteous, look around and see if we are not in the

position of those people who dwell in glass houses and throw stones. Cock-fighting is banned because of the cruelty to the birds and for no other reason, and it is submitted that if cruelty is the only bar then at least half of our other blood sports are infinitely more cruel as the victim or quarry in every case suffers from both terror and pain which, as I have pointed out, is absent in the case of a cock-fight. Among the sports which are more cruel than cock-fighting on account of terror and suffering to the quarry, I would mention stag hunting, hare hunting, hare coursing, hunting the carted deer, and possibly the breeding of pheasants and duck solely for the amusement to be obtained from shooting them.

Some years ago I wrote an article for a magazine on the subject of cock-fighting as compared with other blood sports, and a long and carefully-written reply was received and published. This, however, consisted as usual solely of excuses and justifications—the question of comparative cruelty being completely ignored. The writer justified the hunting man's cruelty by saying he ran risks to life and limb when following the quarry, which is really not an argument at all. Candidly I do not think the dying fox experiences any mitigation of his suffering on hearing that Mr. Thruster has had a bad fall during the last five minutes and has fractured his femur. The correspondent ended up by saying that the hunting man was a better class and a better type than the cock-fighter, which brings us back to the old argument that the fox has said he prefers to be hunted by gentlemen with hounds than to be shot by a farmer with a gun.

As I have taken part in most of the blood sports mentioned, and shall continue to do so, I may say I have written all this with my tongue in my cheek and the consciousness that I am as big a hypocrite as anyone. If there is any difference it is that I am fully aware of it!





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